

In Light of Africa: Globalising Blackness in Northeast Brazil

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Abstract

Africa, as both a place and as an idea, looms large in the construction of Black identity in Brazil and plays an increasingly important role in the identity processes of many Afro-American societies. Consequently, this dissertation seeks to explore how the idea of Africa is used and manipulated in the discourse and formulation of Blackness in the northeastern Brazilian state Bahia. Today, Afro-Brazilian elites and academics—particularly anthropologists—privilege the cultures of the Bight of Benin as crucial markers of a new Black identity in Black Bahia's religious spaces, cultural institutions and social movements. This new form of Black identity seeks to reject the dominant ideology of 'racial democracy' in Brazil and replace it with one that articulates an Africanised approach to Blackness. In this model, Yoruba religious practices are emphasised and placed at the centre of an array of cultural forms including *carnaval*, Afro-Brazilian religion, language instruction, culinary practice and the remnant maroon communities of the Bahian interior. In analysing these movements, the present work eschews the need to define Afro-Brazilian cultural practices in the historical context of a plantation society that contained so-called 'survivals' of African culture. Rather, this work adopts a perspective that simply attempts to understand how ideas such as 'Africa', 'slave', 'roots', '*orixá*', 'Yoruba' and other, similar African concepts are deployed in the creation of Bahian, and more generally, Brazilian Blackness. Further, the construction of Africanised Blackness in Bahia needs to be understood in the context of an ongoing live dialogue

between the cultures and peoples of Afro-America and different regions of the African continent. This dissertation explores this dialogue and also investigates the extent to which these redefinitions actually resonate and penetrate the diverse Black populations of Bahia, including those that are not actively involved with Bahia's Black movements, such as evangelical Christians and residents of the impoverished Bahian interior—the *sertão*.

Keywords: Africa, Bahia, Blackness, Brazil, dialogue, elites, ethnography, identity, Yoruba.

Résumé

L'Afrique, concrète ou imaginée, forme la base de l'identité noire au Brésil et joue un rôle majeur dans la construction identitaire de plusieurs sociétés afro-américaines. La présente thèse explore comment la représentation de l'Afrique est utilisée et manipulée dans le discours et la formation de la négritude dans l'État de Bahia situé au nord-est du Brésil. Aujourd'hui, les élites et les universitaires afro-brésiliens, – particulièrement les anthropologues – considèrent les cultures du Golfe du Bénin comme des jalons essentiels de l'émergence d'une identité noire dans l'État de Bahia, que ce soit dans son espace religieux, ses institutions culturelles et ses mouvements sociaux. Cette nouvelle forme d'identité noire rejette l'idéologie dominante de la "démocratie raciale" du Brésil et lui substitue une version plus africanisée de la négritude. Dans ce nouveau modèle identitaire, les pratiques religieuses Yoruba sont mises en valeur et placées au cœur d'un ensemble de pratiques culturelles qui incluent le carnaval,

la religion afro-brésilienne, l'apprentissage de la langue, la cuisine, et les communautés marrons de l'intérieur de Bahia. L'analyse de ces manifestations culturelles démontre que la prétendue « survivance » d'une culture africaine au Brésil ne trouve pas sa source dans le contexte historique des plantations. Cette étude cherche plutôt à comprendre comment des concepts tels « l'Afrique », « l'esclave », les « racines africaines », « orixà », « Yoruba », ainsi que d'autres concepts associés à l'Afrique sont véhiculés et déployés dans la création de la négritude à Bahia et plus généralement au Brésil. En effet, la construction à Bahia d'une négritude brésilienne africanisée doit être comprise dans le contexte d'un perpétuel dialogue entre des peuples afro-américains et des peuples issus de différentes régions du continent africain. Cette thèse explore ce dialogue culturel et examine comment ces processus de re-définition influencent les diverses populations noires de Bahia, incluant celles qui ne sont pas impliquées activement dans les mouvements noirs, comme par exemple les chrétiens évangéliques et les résidents du sertão, une région pauvre de Bahia.

Mots-clés: Afrique, Bahia, négritude, Brésil, dialogue, élites, ethnographie, identité, Yoruba.

Resumo

A África, como um lugar e como uma idéia, se destaca constantemente para a construção da identidade negra no Brasil e desempenha uma função cada vez mais importante nos processos da identidade em muitas sociedades

afro-americanas. Conseqüentemente, esta dissertação explora como a idéia de África é usada e manipulada no discurso e na formulação da negritude na Bahia, um dos estados nordestinos do Brasil. Atualmente, as elites Afro-Brasileiras e os acadêmicos—especialmente os antropólogos—acentuam as culturas da Nigéria e o Golfo do Benin como marcadores cruciais de uma nova identidade negra nos espaços religiosos, as instituições culturais e os movimentos sociais da Bahia. Este novo tipo de identidade negra procura rejeitar a filosofia dominante de 'democracia racial' no Brasil e retoma um modelo que articula uma forma de negritude Africanizada. Nesta perspectiva, as práticas religiosas dos lorubas são ressaltadas e ocupam uma posição central no carnaval, na religião afro-brasileira, no ensino da língua, nas práticas gastronômicas e nas comunidades remanescentes dos quilombos no sertão baiano. Ao analisar estes movimentos, esta dissertação evita definir as culturas afro-brasileiras no contexto histórico de uma sociedade latifundiária baseada em 'sobrevivências' das culturas africanas. Ao invés, este trabalho adota uma perspectiva que simplesmente tenta entender como idéias, tais como "África", "escravo", "raízes", "orixá", "loruba" dentre outros conceitos africanos semelhantes ganham destaque no processo de criação da negritude baiana, em particular, e, de um modo mais geral, a negritude brasileira. Além disso, a construção da negritude africanizada tem que ser compreendida no contexto de um diálogo interativo entre as culturas e os povos da Afro-América e de regiões diferentes do continente africano. Esta dissertação explora este diálogo e também investiga como estas reconstruções

penetram nas diversas comunidades negras que não participam no movimentos negros da Bahia, tais como os membros das Igrejas evangélicas e os moradores do sertão Baiano.

Palavras chave: África, Bahia, negritude, Brasil, diálogo, elites, etnografia, identidade, Ioruba.

Dedication

This dissertation is dedicated to my wife and partner, Amie Wright. Without her unflagging support and patience, I would not have been able to complete my research nor finish this degree.

Acknowledgements

I first became interested in the African descended cultures of the Americas during extended periods of research, work and teaching in the beautiful and wonderfully hospitable nation of Ghana in West Africa. Ghana has long been a focal point for a continuing dialogue between the African continent and the American world and its participation in this ongoing conversation has been highlighted of late as more and more Americans of African descent look to Ghana as an ancestral home. For my doctoral research, I wanted to combine this longstanding fascination with the societies of West Africa with a theoretical interest in ethnic identity among peoples that exist between different cultural and historical worlds.

I am an Anglo-Indian, born of two cultures and of colonialism. As a product of what was, essentially, British miscegenation in South Asia, I frequently find myself betwixt and between British and Indian culture, playing with and managing different identities as context and circumstance warrant. I believed that this experience, both personally and as an ethnographer, could be brought to bear on the Black cultures of the Americas and allow me to explore issues of identity with which I am intimately familiar while still maintaining my interest in Africa.

Moreover, I wished to explore an ethnographic context in which multiplex identities were being challenged by essentialised ideas of group membership. The shared histories of Latin America and Africa are rife with cases in which

essentialisation and ethnic pigeonholing has led to nothing but hatred and division. If this research is a contribution to anything beyond its scope as a document of intellectual inquiry it is to my firmly held belief that ethnic essentialisation, although often unavoidable, rarely benefits anybody—including those doing the essentialising.

I chose to work in Brazil, as it was a society with which I was already quite familiar. I had spent a year in 1998 travelling throughout South America, spending many months of that time in Brazil. Starting in the South, I made my way up through central Brazil, into Bahia, up to the mouth of the Amazon and then down the length of that mighty river by boat into Colombia. In this largest and most populace of South American countries, issues of hybridised, creolised and mixed identity define the very character the nation—at the same time, issues of race and racism gnaw at its soul. Racial issues are part of Brazil's politics, its culture and its history and yet the country still does, though to a lesser degree than in the past, cling to the belief that all Brazilians are of equally mixed descent.

I entered the doctoral program at McGill University with the purpose of continuing my study on issues pertaining to Black, creolised and hybridised identity and have received unflagging encouragement and guidance from a number of faculty and administrators in the department of anthropology.

I should like to single out a few individuals for particular thanks. My supervisor, John Galaty, has been of tremendous support during my time at

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My gratitude to members of McGill Anthropology's 2007-2008 Anthropology Dissertation Workgroup: Caroline Archambault, Geneviève Dionne, Emily Frank, Eli Guieb, Scott Matter and Karen Mcallister. This group, organised by John Galaty, provided much-needed camaraderie and feedback and kept me motivated and enthused about writing—a special thanks to Geneviève for her assistance with French translation.

I gratefully acknowledge the funding bodies that supported the research upon which this dissertation is based. Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada (SSHRC) Doctoral Fellowship, McGill University Teaching Assistantships, a Travel Grant from the STANDD research institute and a McGill Arts Insight Dissertation Completion Award funded my doctoral studies at McGill and my field research in Brazil and West Africa.

I would also like to thank Michael Bisson, the chair of the anthropology department at McGill University, for having the confidence to hire me as a sessional instructor for five courses during my final two years at McGill. His faith in me as a lecturer has allowed me to develop a course repertoire and my teaching abilities while earning much needed income during the crucial dissertation writing phase of my program. Also, I would not have been able to fulfil my duties as an instructor without the continued assistance of undergraduate co-ordinator, Diane Mann.

McGill University's bureaucracy can be daunting at times. I would not have

made it through this program without the advice and guidance of graduate coordinator Cynthia Romanyk and department administrator, Rose-Marie Stano. They both have my thanks.

I should like to thank Dr. Núbia Rodrigues at the Department of Anthropology, Universidade Federal da Bahia in Salvador. Núbia helped me find my first apartment in Salvador, helped me improve my Portuguese, provided valuable feedback on the manuscript and wholeheartedly believed in my project. To her, my sincere thanks for her support and her friendship.

Finally, and perhaps most importantly, I wish to thank the many individuals—my informants— throughout West Africa and Bahia whose words, ideas, testimonies, responses, questions and actions allowed me to complete this work.

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Chapter 1: Ethnic Identity and the Making of Blackness in Bahia

GEORGIA is 28 years old. He was born in the Ghanaian port city of Cape Coast, capital of the country's Central Region, and the traditional centre of the Fanti people. Cape Coast is a UNESCO world heritage site as it is home to both Cape Coast castle and Elmina castle—two important points of embarkation for the brutal trans-Atlantic slave trade. In his twenties, Georgia left Cape Coast for the Ghanaian port of Tema, just outside of Accra, where he signed on as a deck hand on one of the many trans-oceanic container vessels that regularly ply the sea-lanes between the Atlantic ports of West Africa and Asia. For almost five years he worked these ships, learning German, French and a smattering of other West African languages and working a variety of on-board trades including kitchen boy, cook, crane operator, captain's valet and mechanic. After five years, with no real port to call home, Georgia found himself washed ashore in the Nigerian metropolis of Lagos where he lived for another three years, learning Yoruba, taking a Yoruba name and gaining familiarity with Yoruba traditional religion.

Georgia is an operator, a raconteur and hustler whose facility for language and canny nose for opportunity has led him to many an open port and forms of employment. His current home is now the city of Salvador, Bahia, Brazil. He lives

there illegally, without paper or permit, in accommodation rented under an alias, and works primarily as a tour guide. He orients his work as a guide towards those individuals, principally Black Americans, interested in exploring the African and slave history of the state of Bahia. As part of his repertoire of tours, he frequently provides tours of the slave fort in Salvador's harbour—a twist of fate not lost on Georgia. He tells his clients, many of whom have already visited Ghana prior to their tour of Brazil:

I come from Cape Coast you know. So it's right that I give you this tour, you know. Slaves left for Brazil from my hometown and we have two forts like this back home. In the past I could have been one of those slaves! Oh, so now, instead of showing you the fort in Ghana, I show you the fort in Brazil! Ironical, no?¹

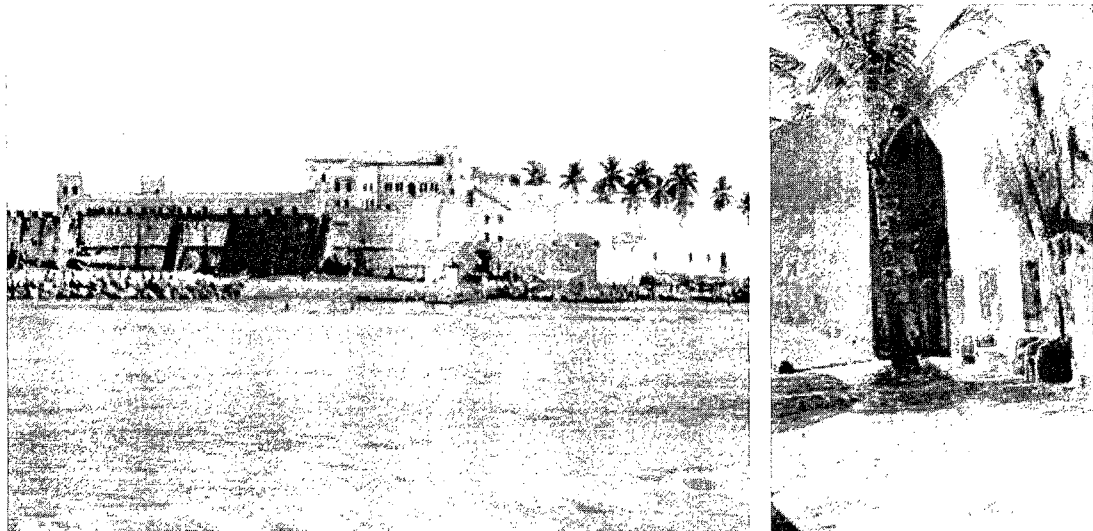


Figure 1.1 Elmina Castle in Ghana and the Salvador Slave Fort, Bahia, Brazil.

Another important component of Georgia's tours are visits to so-called

¹ Comments recorded during participation in a tour led by Georgia for a group of Black American travellers from Atlanta, 13/9/2005

‘authentic’ houses of Afro-Brazilian religious practice or *Candomblé*. Here, travellers witness the religious forms which have made Bahia famous—both in the literature of Brazilian authors such as Jorge Amado and in the anthropology of scholars such as Melville Herskovits, Ruth Landes and others. Invariably, conversation between tourists and Georgia turns to his opinions about Afro-Brazilian culture: “Do they get it right? Is this really similar to what you saw growing up in *Africa*? Georgia, you speak Yoruba, can you understand the Yoruba phrases used in the rituals?” Just as invariably, Georgia responds that “Yes! This is just like what I would see when I lived in Lagos. In fact, I think the rituals here are more accurate because Brazil wasn’t colonized by the British who tried to stamp out these kind of witchcraft practices!”

Georgia is a consummate master of his craft. He has a quick wit and charm to spare and is able to spin a wonderfully convincing web of genuineness around stories about his ‘African’ homeland. To be sure, sometimes his tales get a little tall, especially when he tries to go for a little bit of added colour by highlighting the place of ‘sacrifice’ in ‘African’ societies. Ultimately however, the clients of this trans-national *griot* are almost always completely taken and utterly convinced by his performance and are ever eager to hear more about the ‘true’ Africa.

Initially, Georgia was sceptical about allowing me accompany him on one of his tours. When we first met, he was extremely pleased to know someone who had spent time in Ghana. The vast majority of Africans living in Salvador are from Nigeria. Georgia knows most of the Nigerians in town and often works with them

but seemed extremely happy to talk about a place other than Lagos. I knew most of Georgia's boyhood haunts and we talked through the night about Ghana on the evening of our introduction and on many nights after. After taking some time to get to know Georgia better, I asked him if I might accompany him on his one of his tours to a *terreiro* or house of *Candomblé* worship in his home neighbourhood. He was very reluctant at first, informing me that "this was his business, and we wouldn't have time for me." I explained that I would not say a word during the tour and would be there solely to take photographs, observe and help out if needed.

Now, I had seen Georgia working his magic a number of times prior to accompanying him on a tour. During the weeks since our introduction I had gotten to know the group of twenty or so Nigerians, primarily Yoruba men from Lagos but also some Igbo from the delta area, with whom he associated and worked. Whenever we met for evening drinks or to talk, there were usually a large number of Brazilians present who were members of a *terreiro* or who were enrolled in Yoruba classes at the local university. These were individuals eager to learn about Africa and all things African and Georgia was often at the centre of this group, weaving tales of African chiefs, leopard hunts, tribal warfare, and rites of initiation—often with the rolled eyes and the stifled laughter of his Nigerian comrades in the background.

After the tour Georgia told me he was glad that I came along but equally glad that I didn't contradict him in any way. "Why?" I asked. "Because," Georgia

replied “You know something about Africa and about Ghana, and I didn’t want you behaving the way those Lagos boys carry on.” Georgia continued:

Look, you know and I know that I have to cook some of this stuff up. But the reason is these people don’t want to hear about the traffic problems in Lagos or Accra, or the problems with the politicians in Nigeria. They want to hear about blood and sacrifice and chiefs and lions. And I tell you; the Black Americans are not the ones we have to worry about. Listen. I don’t get my best money from Black Americans. Most of them can’t be bargained with, plus they know a little about Ghana or Senegal and my stories don’t work so well with them. My best contacts are with the Brazilians. So yes, I work the American tourists but I keep those Brazilians who want to know Africa close because through them I can get work playing ‘African’ music at carnival; I can have a market for selling African arts and crafts that I help import from Lagos. Listen my friend, Black Brazilians want to know more about Africa than Black Americans so I can’t even let some of them know that I’m not even a Yoruba—for them Africa means Yoruba—and its like they want to be African!²

Georgia is every bit the cultural entrepreneur. He is actively engaged in helping to define what counts as ‘African’ in the urban context of Salvador, Bahia, a city steeped in African heritage and with a population whose vast majority is descended—to some extent or another—from African slaves. Identity in Salvador and in much of Bahia is about Blackness, about how the place of Africa and the past of slavery helps to construct exactly what ‘Black’ means. His story, and the others presented in this ethnographic account are ultimately intended to help us better understand how ‘Africa’ as both a discursive concept and as a real place is used by Brazilians in Bahia in mobilizing various forms of ethnic identity.

² Interview with Georgia. Salvador, Bahia, Brazil. 21/9/2005

Introduction

This work is concerned with the issue of Blackness in Brazil. Blackness, not just as a racial category or skin colour, but as a cultural and social trope that includes, for those with whom the concept resonates, aspects of ancestry, religious practice, economic condition and community.

In the northeastern Brazilian city of Salvador and, more broadly, in the state of Bahia, what it means to be Black is continuously being redefined. For much of Brazil's history Blackness meant, for many, no more than a skin colour. This skin colour, to be sure, typically meant a life of poverty, menial work and exclusion from decision making, but it was not a category that necessarily implied a different cultural or symbolic universe from the rest of Brazilian society—simply a more impoverished and disadvantaged perspective on that universe.

However, in the predominantly Afro-Brazilian cultural milieu of contemporary Bahia, Blackness has now come to be equated with an array of beliefs and ideas, many of which are distinct from mainstream 'Brazilian' culture. For members of the Afro-Brazilian religious congregations, Blackness, they assert, must come to mean more than just an awareness of African descent. For these groups it implies the practice of what they believe are 'African' religious rituals, 'African' values and the learning of an African language—in other words, the Africanisation of their Black identity. Concomitantly, this form of Blackness also requires the rejection of Christianity and European ideas, such as syncretism and

belief in Catholic saints.

This approach to Blackness is one that has become dominant in popular depictions of Salvador and of Bahia, but it is not one that is accepted by all members of the Black community. The Africanisation of Black identity is highly contested and differing points of view on how and indeed, whether Africa should be incorporated into definitions of Afro-Brazilian Blackness abound.

The present work is concerned with precisely this diversity of voices. It seeks to explore the ways in which Brazilians of African descent in the northeastern state of Bahia employ the concept of a 'remembered' Africa as a homeland and source of identity, how Africa symbolises the past, present and future for many Afro-Brazilians and how entrepreneurs of identity—anthropologists included—have used and continue to use the 'African' past of Black communities in Brazil and elsewhere in the Americas as the symbolic mainstay of Black identity.

Moreover, this work also seeks to explore how contemporary interactions and exchanges between Africa and Brazil continue to impact the extent to which elements of African cultures are included in constructions of Blackness in Bahia. This interaction takes the form not only of nebulous exchanges of popular culture, but of direct person-to-person interchange between Africans and Black Brazilians both in Bahia and in the African 'homeland.'

These manifold manifestations of Africanity in Brazil will be explored through

a variety of lenses and filters. However, I seek, first and foremost, to examine this interaction within the key metaphor of ongoing dialogue. Anthropologist J. Lorand Matory (1999a), along with art historians Michael Harris (1999) and Moyo Okediji (1999), have all suggested that the most useful concept-metaphor to describe the continued exchange of people and ideas between Africa and the Americas is that of 'dialogue'. They all note that the intercontinental movement of people, ideas and commodities has wrought "incalculable" demographic and political changes throughout the Afro-Atlantic world and that African and Afro-American peoples were not only victims but also agents of this interaction (Matory 2005:165). Furthermore, the metaphor of dialogue will also be used to examine the role that scholars—particularly ethnographers—have played in the construction of Africanised Blackness through. This dialogue is not the one that post-modern anthropology has insisted exists in ethnographic text. Rather, it is the interaction and exchange that takes place between the producers *and* the consumers of ethnography, between those who *inscribe* culture and those who use those inscribed products to *make* culture.

Analysis of this dialogue will be achieved through both an exploration of the results of field research conducted in Bahia, Brazil, and in West Africa and also through a discussion of the development of the Afro-American *problématique* in American cultural anthropology and the relevance of the ideas of creolisation and African 'survivals' to former slave plantation societies. Ethnographically speaking, this work will trace the patterns of dialogue between Africa and Northeast Brazil

in a variety of contexts. These include: the practice of cultural tourism or pilgrimages to West Africa conducted by the devotees of Afro-Brazilian religious centres; the discourse of cultural, religious and intellectual elites in the Africanising of Brazilian Blackness; the lives of West African cultural brokers who now work and reside in the city of Salvador and who are actively engaged in negotiating ideas of Africa for a Brazilian audience; and the attitudes and beliefs of people who are not part of the process of Africanisation, such as devout Black Catholics, evangelicals and residents of the impoverished interior country of Bahia.

This work is also about identity, identities created, both old and new, by those individuals who actively claim descent from African slaves in the area of Northeast Brazil that was once home to some of the largest slave-based plantation economies the world has ever seen. Specifically, this study scrutinizes the construction of Black ethnic identity in both urban and rural contexts within the predominantly Black state of Bahia in Brazil. This work seeks to shift away from attempts to recreate and verify the 'authentic pasts' of enslaved Africans and focuses instead on the rhetorical and ideological labour that discourses on Africa and both African and slave origins are made to perform in the domain of Brazilian ethnic identity and Black identity in Brazil.

Identity is best understood as the situational construction of self in relation to other individuals and groups. As such, one constantly defines and redefines his or her identity based on context, history, environment, interaction and

circumstance. Although the process of ethnic identity construction often entails considerable external ascription and definition, groups that are on the margins of society; historically oppressed groups; enslaved groups; those without power or control over their lives, do not always have to accept the label or category that the broader society imposes upon them. They can and do forge their own sense of self and identity. Through the process of identity creation, individuals and collectivities imagine and create themselves. Collective identity emerges at both the psychological and social levels out of the efforts of individuals to organize their senses of self, based on perceived commonalities with each other and difference from 'others'. Consequently, identity must be fluid and dynamic: evolving, disappearing, changing and reforming in response to changing social contexts.

Throughout the present work I emphasise Black identity as an ethnic category and not as a social boundary defined by phenotypic characteristics. Consequently, 'Black' and 'Blackness' are presented in a capitalised form to distinguish them from mere descriptions of skin colour. This is not simply a stylistic form done to appease notions of political correctness. Rather, 'Black' identity represents an idea of collectivity and group membership that goes beyond forms of racial classification and shared ancestry implied in the use of 'black' to describe the pigmentation of an individual's skin.

Black ethnic identity means different things to different people. Indeed, much of this dissertation deals with the contestation of what should count as

Black identity—what Barth calls the “cultural stuff” within an ethnic boundary (1969:15). For members of communities that reckon and present themselves as Black in Brazil, this term means more than just a skin colour or a ‘Black culture’, *per se*, that is defined by notions of class, racism and colonial history. In Brazil, Black as an ethnic category increasingly means an array of cultural practices, religious beliefs and contested ideas about the importance of Africa in the construction of Black identity.

In this dissertation I speak of ‘Black’ social movements in Brazil, of ‘Black’ peoples in Brazil, of the ‘Black’ cultural renaissance in Harlem in the 1920s and 1930s and of ‘Black’ American society. I refer to these as ‘Black’ in order to distinguish them as more than just the fruits of thought and action committed by people with a particular skin colour—but as the product of the ideas and labour of culturally distinct Black communities, that, as a result of the slave trade and of life in the plantation, had no other term to describe their collectivities and their identities other than a colour.

Some communities, such as those in the United States, have sought to use the term African American to describe Black society in a way that does not hinge purely on skin colour. This phrase, however, has not gained universal acceptance in the U.S. precisely because ‘Africa’, as both a place and an idea, does not mean the same thing to all members of Black American society. In Brazil, ‘Afro-Brazilian’ is the term that is largely used to describe Black communities and the Portuguese word, *preto*, to describe Black skin colour.

Increasingly, however, another word for black—*negro*—is used to describe not only the colour of people's skins, but also as an appellation to describe a discrete ethnic identity. I say *ethnic* identity, precisely because those involved in manufacturing, negotiating and presenting the markers and criteria for membership in this group look to symbols and ideas that they believe are *ethnically* distinct from mainstream Brazilian society.

In this thesis, I make no grand proclamations or assertions that one appellation or label is better than another. I use 'Black' as an identity category because some people in Brazil who have black skin colour do not identify with an African-oriented representation of ethnicity and because I seek to stress the diverse aspects of Black Brazilian 'culture', rather than ideas about nationality or purported origin. Put simply, I propose that the way in which 'Black' is defined as an ethnic category differs greatly throughout the Americas and that 'Black', therefore, must be understood as more than just a skin colour. Ideas such as 'Black' power and 'Black' identity draw on more than just a word that describes the higher presence of melanin or certain hair forms or facial features. These concepts speak directly to emic perceptions that Black communities possess and retain cultural resources that are *ethnically* different from those within other communities.

Other scholars have attempted to demonstrate that Black identity and Blackness, as an ethnic category, need to be understood in the context of shifting and diverse ideas of Black culture, the history of Black communities and the

relevance of an idea of Africa. Peter Wade (1986, 1993, 1995, 1999, 2006), who has conducted extensive ethnographic research with Black communities in Colombia, has shown that multiplex and diverse definitions of Blackness in that country are often at odds with each other. Wade asserts that dominant and militant definitions of who is Black often leads to the reification of Blackness and the perpetuation of “essentialist notions of race” (1995:351). Deborah Thomas and Tina Campt (2006, 2007), in a series of recorded dialogues, have demonstrated how certain key symbols, many of them oriented towards Africa, have dominated globalised ideas of Blackness. However, they also demonstrate that within the context of what they term “Diasporic Hegemonies” (Thomas et al 2006:163), there exists a plurality of ideas about what Blackness should mean. Andrews, in his survey of Afro-Latin America, describes a process that he calls the “Blackening” of social movements in Latin America during the 1970s (2004:183-190). This form of mobilisation, in countries such as Brazil, Colombia, Costa Rica, Panama and Peru, took the form of increased emphasis on elements of Black culture—primarily expressions of Africanity in the Latin American context—as a way to unify and concretise an identity for Black people. Often these militant ideas of Blackness failed to resonate with many poorer Blacks, but all of the ‘Blackening’ movements discussed by Andrews focused on a construction of Blackness that transcended phenotype and skin colour and emphasised the ‘cultural’ aspects of Black identity. Ultimately, all of these studies demonstrate that locally invented notions of Blackness draw on diverse cultural

sources and an array of symbols that go beyond the colour of one's skin.

In this work, similar processes of reification are explored in how Blackness is constructed in the state of Bahia. Here, African-oriented constructions of Blackness have dominated, but these ideas look not to notions of skin colour but to the mobilization of what the leaders of such movements define as Black culture and Black history. Indeed, this form of Black Brazilian identity seeks to emphatically reject membership based on the vagaries of skin colour and accentuates the importance of Black cultural praxis and the re-orientation of Black identity towards Africa.

This study follows the path that Black identity wends within two major domains: firstly, It seeks to interpret the impact that a contemporary flow of ideas and peoples between Bahia and the coast of West Africa has on how Afro-Brazilian construct popular Blackness in Brazil; secondly, the work explores how Bahians, both rural and urban, use or employ a discourse about 'Africa' and the slave past in conceptions of personal and collective ethnic identity. In emphasizing concepts and ideas, however, I do not wish in this work to ignore the actual brutality of life on the plantation or the inhumanity of the Middle Passage. Past *are* important to how contemporary identities are constructed. Although I emphasise that an exploration of contemporary identity processes is more important than determining the 'true' ethnic composition of the slave plantation, I approach this material with the understanding that Brazilian society is very much a product of rapid creolisation that began within the milieu of the

plantation. Further, I contend that the complexities of ethnic identity in Brazil and the place of 'Africa' in this discourse are best understood within a context of increasingly globalised notions of Blackness that build on some of the same forces at work in creolisation and the legacy of the plantation.

Anthropologists Sidney W. Mintz and Richard Price (1976), in their essay *An Anthropological Approach to the Afro-American Past: A Caribbean Perspective*, laid out the elements of a model for understanding the creation of Afro-American cultures that emphasizes phenomenological and situational approaches to the generation of new American identities. For Mintz and Price, Africans in the Americas only shared a *culture* insofar as they themselves created it. This generative approach to culture formation has much in common with an approach to identity construction that takes into account the importance of boundary maintenance from the actor's point of view and the situational definition of collective or group:

The context of slavery and the initial cultural heterogeneity of the enslaved produced among them a general openness to ideas and usages from other cultural traditions...within the strict limits set by the conditions of slavery, Afro-Americans learned to put a premium on innovation and individual creativity.... From the first, then, the commitment to a new culture by Afro-Americans in a given place included an expectation of continued dynamism, change, elaboration, plus creativity. (Mintz and Price 1976:26)

For Mintz and Price, the process of enslavement resulted in ethnically diverse groups of Africans forced to live together in the plantation who did not know each other's customs, languages, traditions, marriage patterns or beliefs Afro-

American cultures, this model posits, were 'created' in the slave sector, in the plantations, *fazendas* and *haciendas* of the Americas and Caribbean—these locations being some of the only social spaces within which slaves could act with some degree of autonomy and creativity.

I believe that attempting to authenticate the past is, ultimately, of little relevance to an understanding of how Africa is incorporated into contemporary identity processes. However, this does not imply that we must reject the model of rapid creolisation offered by Mintz and Price. Rather, the emergent Afro-American cultures that were born in the plantations sought, as contemporary Afro-American societies do, to find a place for Africa and Africanity in how they defined themselves. The search to find commonality in the diverse symbolic and cultural repertoire that different African groups brought to their enslaved existence necessitated that the *idea* of Africa become an important signifier of group identity. Indeed, any study which seeks to understand how Africa, as a concept and symbol, is mediated and negotiated in the process of making culture must necessarily, I believe, begin with the assumption that creolisation of slave communities was the norm. This is because Africa is, and remains, a *contested* symbol of Black identity in Brazil, and throughout Afro-America, as opposed to an assumed, ineffable or essential connection with precise areas in the African motherland.

Rather, I suggest that the futility lies in continued attempts by many scholars (see Gomez 1998, 2005, 2006; Hall 2005; Reis 2006) to divine and uncover the

precise ethnic composition of the enslaved population in American societies and to make assertions about present day ethnic conditions from this data. Certainly, there is little doubt that particular regions of Africa contributed far more to the slave population of the Americas and specifically to Brazil than other parts of the continent, that certain regions were over-represented in the 17th century, others in the 18th century, and so on. Further, ideas about where one's ancestors originated have always, will always, fascinate and stir the descendants of enslaved, displaced or migrant peoples. However, to suggest that current cultural practices within Afro-American societies are the products of traditions that persisted and survived in the face of the brutality and oppression of slavery is simply not supported by the data. Cultural practice in Black communities in Brazil and, I believe, in much of the Americas which evokes and 'remembers' an African past or an idea of Africa is about identity today, not about the nature of the past. It is constructed in a world in which racism, prejudice and marginalisation abound and is, in almost every way, a response to these societal patterns.

Trouillot warns that "as social theory becomes more discourse-oriented...historical circumstances fall further into a hazy background of ideological preferences" (1998:15). It is a caveat that this researcher takes most seriously. The past is important, but when it proves difficult to unearth, it is not unsafe to assume that much contemporary discourse about the past is just that—discourse—and that the consequences of history are more and more about how the past is viewed rather than what *really* happened. Fragments of these pasts,

then, help us to understand the formation and structure of discourse in the present. Indeed, by accepting the process of creolisation in the context of the plantation as a baseline for our study of situational identity formation, one avoids much of the critique that such approaches to identity are flawed by an inherent ahistoricism.

Brazil

Images and ideas of the exotic have always dominated perceptions of Brazil by non-Brazilians. From the pulsating and sensual rhythms of samba and carnival to the verdant—though rapidly diminishing—forests of the Amazon basin to the sprawling megalopolis cities of São Paulo and Rio de Janeiro and carnivorous *vaqueiro* or ‘cowboy’ culture of the Southeast to the West African influenced traditions of the Northeast—*O Nordeste*—it is a country that has long fascinated outsiders.

The actual Brazil is, unsurprisingly, very different. Brazil is a giant in the area of manufacturing and industrialized food production, both in the area of agricultural crops and livestock, and is the fifth largest country in the world by landmass and population. Although the vibrant and creative cultural environment that many are familiar with does indeed exist, there is amazing regional variation in manifestation and expression across this vast country, much of which is a consequence of the high level of ethnic and religious diversity in Brazil.



Figure 1.2 Map of Brazil highlighting the state of Bahia.

Brazil was founded in the name of the Catholic Portuguese Crown and remains the world's largest Roman Catholic nation. In 1500, the Portuguese navigator Pedro Álvares Cabral reached the coast of present day Brazil and formally claimed the surrounding region in the name of Portugal. The territory was named *Terra da Vera Cruz*—The Land of the True Cross. Jesuit missionaries began to operate in the Amazon delta region in the early 17th

century and by the middle of that century parties of *Paulistas*, the name by which residents of the southern São Paulo region were known, had reached the upper course of the Paraná River. Because these expeditions were undertaken principally for the purpose of enslaving the native South Americans, the *Paulistas* encountered vigorous opposition from the Jesuits. Supported by the Crown in their efforts to protect the indigenous peoples, the Jesuits initially found success. However, the Portuguese foreign minister and premier, the Marquês de Pombal, who controlled and manipulated the Portuguese crown, was fiercely hostile towards the Catholic Church and instituted far reaching political and social reforms in Brazil that severely curtailed the rights and privileges of the clergy. By 1760, Pombal had expelled all Jesuits from Brazil, a move which was widely supported by Portuguese Brazilians who had become resentful of the Jesuit's influence among the Native Americans and their growing economic power. However, the Pombaline reforms would have little long lasting effect on the Church's power in Brazil and did not, ultimately, prevent Brazil from growing into what would become the largest Catholic nation in the world.

Today, the majority of Brazilians today are self admitted Catholics but many others are devotees of Protestant and Evangelical churches or members Afro-Brazilian religious congregations. Similarly, many Amazonian and other Amerindian groups actively practice a form of Christianity along with own indigenous religious traditions. Brazilian religious behaviour can be extremely variable and complex, with many claiming to be followers of numerous traditions

as the need, and as one's place in society, fluctuates.

Ethnically, Brazil's population is composed of: more persons of African descent than any country other than Nigeria; the largest diasporic Japanese population outside of Japan; and, collectively, the largest number of people who reckon their descent from the Levant outside of the Middle East. Large numbers of immigrants from Italy, Germany, Switzerland and other European countries, not to mention the descendants of the original Portuguese colonial population and the hundreds of aboriginal Amerindian groups also call Brazil home (Lesser 1999:374-378).

Yet despite this diversity, there is a saying in Brazil that speaks to a certain level of homogeneity in Brazil's ethnic composition: Brasil, 100% mestiço! — essentially, 100% mixed descent. Although glib, this slogan, while mocking notions of ethnic purity, speaks to the popularly held belief that the vast majority of Brazilians are of mixed ethnic descent. Indeed, lay approaches to the history and contemporary legacy of Brazil's ethnic past often subscribes to a founding myth in which the *povo*—the 'people'—of Brazil are composed of three principal 'races': the European, the Amerindian and the African.

Although oversimplified, this founding myth speaks to a fundamental truth—by 1800 two-thirds of Brazil's population was African in origin. This was the result of an intense slave trade between Brazil and West Africa that, by 1800, had been in operation for some 250 years. African slaves had been brought to Brazil in the

early days of Portuguese expansion into South America. However, it was not until the development of Brazil as one of the principal growers of sugar cane in the western hemisphere that the importation of African slaves became essential to the Brazilian economy (Russell-Wood 2002:27). During this period African slaves gradually replaced enslaved Amerindian labourers in the cane plantations of Northeast Brazil, in states such as Bahia.

The state of Bahia takes its name from the large Bay of All Saints or *Bahia de Todos os Santos* that has long been a natural harbour for ocean-going vessels making trans-Atlantic voyages during the era of sail and wind power. Historically, many European powers, including the British, French, Spanish and Portuguese would use the bay as an important anchorage as they headed southward through the tropics in order to round either the Horn or the Cape of Good Hope.

In 1510 a Portuguese ship was wrecked on the coast of the southernmost tip of land that juts into the bay and separates its calmer waters from the Atlantic. In 1534, a city was founded at this same point by Francisco Pereira Coutinho, who named it Vila Velha or "Old Town." Later, in 1549, the first Portuguese Governor General of Brazil and official representative of the Portuguese Crown renamed the city Salvador or the City of the Saviour and established it as Brazil's first capital. Salvador became the first Catholic diocese in Brazil and one of the most important cities in the Americas until the port of Rio de Janeiro eclipsed it and the capital of Brazil was moved southward.

It is the state of Bahia and its largest city, Salvador, which serves as the setting for my discussion of the construction and negotiation of Afro-Brazilian identity. Salvador, called the Black Rome of the Americas by anthropologist Ruth Landes (1947) because of its centrality in the history of both slavery and slave revolt in Brazil, is one of the oldest cities in Brazil and in the Americas.

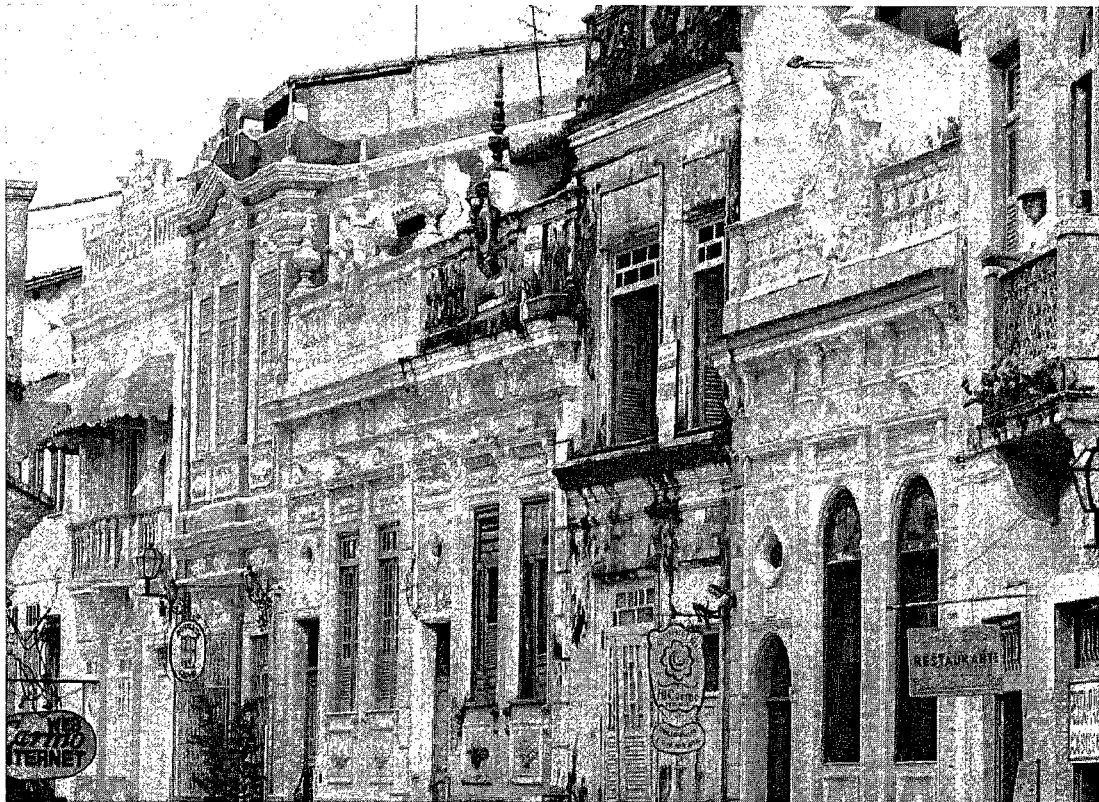


Figure 1.3 One of the streets leading into the colonial-era old city in Salvador. Noted for its colourful 18th and 19th century buildings.

Salvador is the third most populous Brazilian city, after São Paulo and Rio de Janeiro, and the most populous city in northeastern Brazil. Most Brazilians see Salvador, indeed the entire state of Bahia, as the Blackest and most 'African' part of the country and the Northeast as the poorest and most backward region.

Salvador was colonial Brazil's capital until 1763 and served, until the decline of the sugar cane industry, as the principal point of sale and export for the vast plantations of the region known as the Recôncavo, the area of fertile agricultural land which surrounds the Bay of All Saints from which Bahia takes its name. Salvador in the 19th century was a city that displayed all of the splendour and opulence of an urban centre in its prime—sugar was king and Salvador reaped its profits on the backs of the slaves who laboured in the fields and mills of the Recôncavo. In addition to sugar cane, other crops such as tobacco—which was used to trade for slaves on the coast of West Africa—coffee, cotton and cocoa were also cultivated in slave based plantation estates throughout the Recôncavo. Beyond this region, in the thinly populated and arid *sertão* or semi-desert, extensive cattle ranches developed along the back of the São Francisco river in order to provide meat to the urban metropolis of Salvador.

After the crash of the sugar market at the end of the 19th century, the abolition of slavery in 1888 and the proclamation of the Brazilian republic in 1889, Bahia become something of a stagnant economic backwater in turn-of-the-century Brazil. Salvador, and indeed much of the Northeast, fell behind the thriving industrial centres of the Southeast and lost increasing numbers of workers to the factories of São Paulo and Rio de Janeiro states (Kraay 1998:7).

Today, Bahia and the Northeast remains one of the poorest regions of the country with a population concentrated around the large coastal cities and the lush agricultural land that surround them. Most of the population is still employed

in agrarian work, in the service sector, working in the petroleum industry or engaged in the growing tourist industry that seeks to capitalize on the state's slave past. The 2007 Brazilian Institute of Geography and Statistics (Instituto Brasileiro de Geografia e Estatística: IBGE) census estimated that there are about 14 million people living in the state with close to 60% of that population living in the city of Salvador and its surrounding environs and suburbs.

What colour are you?

Throughout the 20th century, in contrast to the United States, the social construction of 'race' in Brazil has been framed by the notion of a "racial democracy" that teaches Brazilians to understand differences and inequality along lines of class, not colour. This model, although largely discredited by many activists and scholars, still very much permeates popular Brazilian society and the public education system. Hasenbalg (1992:160) has suggested that the reason for the continued 'success' of this model is that the denunciation of racism and rediscovery or retrieval of a Black identity through cultural means are abstract and removed from the life of poverty that the majority of the Black population of Brazil must daily confront.

Perceptions and constructions of 'race' and colour in Brazil differ significantly from those in the United States. In the United States, anyone with *any* amount of Black ancestry that is phenotypically visible is defined as Black. Many Black activists in Brazil argue that, at a certain level, Black Americans have

got it right—they understand that although racial prejudice in the United States developed out of a history of slavery and economic, class based oppression, the battle against poverty and marginalisation in the Black community must be fought—or so they believe—on the basis of race.

As anthropologists, we are trained to see the category of race as an outmoded concept loaded with a history of prejudice and bigotry and of little analytical use in understanding identity politics and ethnic dynamics. However, it is important to remember that for the majority of the world's population, the concept of 'race' is still very much alive and filled with potency as a social category—in Brazil, this is most certainly the case.

In 1976, the Brazilian Institute of Geography and Statistics, the government agency responsible for taking a census of the national population prepared a list of terms that people used to describe their skin colour. The results yielded a list of 134 oft-cited terms from throughout the country that are differentiated on the basis of perceived degrees of difference in skin colour. The study was commissioned because many had complained that the ethnic categories previously used by the agency were insufficient, overemphasised discrete 'racial' categories and did not represent the many subtle variations that were part of what many policy makers and governmental social scientists in the 1970s still believed was Brazil's 'racial democracy'.

Table 1.1 List of skin colour terms from 1976 census— Instituto Brasileiro de Geografia e Estatística (IBGE: 1976)

Acastanhada (cashew-like tint; caramel coloured)	Bugrezinha-escura (Indian characteristics)	Laranja (orange)	Mulata (mixture of white and Negro)
Agalegada	Burro-quando-foge ("burro running away," implying racial mixture of unknown origin)	Lilás (lily)	Mulatinha (lighter-skinned white-Negro)
Alva (pure white)	Cabocla (mixture of white, Negro and Indian)	Loira (blond hair and white skin)	Negra (negro)
Alva-escura (dark or off-white)	Cabo-Verde (black; Cape Verdean)	Loira-clara (pale blond)	Negrota (Negro with a corpulent body)
Alverenta (or aliviero, "shadow in the water")	Café (coffee)	Loura (blond)	Pálida (pale)
Alvarinta (tinted or bleached white)	Café-com-leite (coffee with milk)	Lourinha (flaxen)	Paraíba (like the colour of marupa wood)
Alva-rosada (or jambote, roseate, white with pink highlights)	Canela (cinnamon)	Malaia (from Malabar)	Parda (dark brown)
Alvinha (bleached; white-washed)	Canelada (tawny)	Marinheira (dark greyish)	Parda-clara (lighter-skinned person of mixed 'race')
Amarela (yellow)	Castão (thistle coloured)	Marrom (brown)	Polaca (Polish features; prostitute)
Amarelada (yellowish)	Castanha (cashew)	Meio-amerela (mid-yellow)	Pouco-clara (not very clear)
Amarela-queimada (burnt yellow or ochre)	Castanha-clara (clear, cashew-like)	Meio-branca (mid-white)	Pouco-morena (dusky)
Amarelosa (yellowed)	Castanha-escura (dark, cashew-like)	Meio-morena (mid-tan)	Preta (black)
Amorenada (tannish)	Chocolate (chocolate brown)	Meio-preta (mid-Negro)	Pretinha (black of a lighter hue)
Avermelhada (reddish, with blood vessels showing through the skin)	Clara (light)	Melada (honey coloured)	Puxa-para-branca (more like a white than a mulata)
Azul (bluish)	Clarinha (very light)	Mestiça (mixture of white and Indian)	Quase-negra (almost Negro)
Azul-marinho (deep bluish)	Cobre (copper hued)	Miscigenação (mixed --- literally "miscegenated")	Queimada (burnt)
Baiano (ebony)	Corado (ruddy)	Mista (mixed)	Queimada-de-praia (suntanned)
Bem-branca (very white)	Cor-de-café (tint of coffee)	Morena (tan)	Queimada-de-sol (sunburned)
Bem-clara (translucent)	Cor-de-canela (tint of cinnamon)	Morena-bem-chegada (very tan)	Regular (regular; nondescript)
Bem-morena (very dusky)	Cor-de-cuia (tea coloured)	Morena-bronzada (bronzed tan)	Retinta ("layered" dark skin)
Branca (white)	Cor-de-leite (milky)	Morena-canelada (cinnamon-like brunette)	Rosa (roseate)
Branca-avermelhada (peach white)	Cor-de-oro (golden)	Morena-castanha (cashew-like tan)	Rosada (high pink)
Branca-melada (honey toned)	Cor-de-rosa (pink)	Morena clara (light tan)	Rosa-queimada (burnished rose)
Branca-morena (darkish white)	Cor-firma ("no doubt about it")	Morena-cor-de-canela (cinnamon-hued brunette)	Roxa (purplish)
Branca-pálida (pallid)	Crioula (little servant or slave; African)	Morena-jambo (dark red)	Ruiva (strawberry blond)
Branca-queimada (sunburned white)	Encerada (waxy)	Morenada (mocha)	Russo (Russian; see also polaca)
Branca-sardenta (white with brown spots)	Enxofrada (pallid yellow; jaundiced)	Morena-escura (dark tan)	Sapecada (burnished red)
Branca-suja (dirty white)	Esbranquecimento (mostly white)	Morena-fechada (very dark, almost mulata)	Sará (mulata with reddish kinky hair, aquiline nose)
Branquiça (a white variation)	Escura (dark)	Morenã (very dusky tan)	Saraúba (or saraiva: like a white meringue)
Branquinha (whitish)	Escurinha (semi-dark)	Morena-parda (brown-hued tan)	Tostada (toasted)
Bronze (bronze)	Fogoio (florid; flushed)	Morena-roxa (purplish-tan)	Trigueira (wheat coloured)
Bronzeada (bronzed tan)	Galega (see agalegada above)	Morena-ruiva (reddish-tan)	Turva (opaque)
	Galegada (see agalegada above)	Morena-trigueira (wheat coloured)	Verde (greenish)
	Jambo (blood orange)	Moreninha (toffee-like)	Vermelha (reddish)

The difficult question is, of course, 'what kind of information is presented in this list of terms?' First of all, many of these terms are still in daily usage in Brazil. It is not uncommon to hear people describe individuals or themselves as *baianos*,

morenas or *pretas*. Further, although present in the list, the term Negro was, for a very long time, rejected or avoided as undesirable as a phenotypic appellation. The vast majority of terms presented in this list speak to some form of mixed descent with Black and Amerindian ancestry as the principle sources for non-white skin colour. The presence of such a high number of very specific racial categories that reference one's precise skin colour, facial structure and hair form represents something of an attempt to elide the glaring disparities between peoples of European descent and those with even the most minute amount of African or Amerindian descent.



Figure 1.4 Tee-shirts proclaiming '100% Negro'.

The kind of fine grain ethnic detail found in this list is changing. More and more people in Brazil openly self-identify as *negros*—Blacks—or as Afro-Brazilians or increasingly as *afro-descendentes*—the descendants of Africans. Why? The Black consciousness movements in Brazil or *movimentos negros*, the Afro-Brazilian religious groups such as *Candomblé*, the exclusively Black carnival

associations and many government funded community development agencies are enjoying increased success in tapping into and mobilizing constituencies of urban Blacks along lines of clear Black–White difference. The epicentre for this change in the nature of Brazilian ethnic politics is Salvador. I use the word ‘epicentre’ here deliberately, as there are clear ripple effects in this transmutation of ethnic categories throughout the country, most especially in the industrialised southern cities of Rio de Janeiro and São Paulo.

The ideological core of the Black movements in Bahia is that the North American model of hypo-descent—where one drop of Black blood is enough—should be adopted in Brazil and that the image of Brazil as a society un-afflicted by racism and discrimination was invented by the white ruling class to keep the Black masses subservient. Instilling pride in being Black, to whatever degree, is vitally important and requires Black men and women of all shades to understand that to truly appreciate what it means to be Black, they must come to value their ‘African’ heritage and orient their expression of Blackness towards an idea of Africa.

Black activists now present, to those they assert as their constituents, a set or, following Goffman (1974), frame of claims or ideas about what experiences they deem important for membership within a particular group. In the context of identitarian social movements, Goffman used frames to describe the process through which bodies of symbols and ideas pertaining to an ideology are communicated to constituents or participants of a particular community and to

those opposed to the ideology. Social movements gain traction and are successful when there is resonance between the goals of organisers and elites—those involved in mobilising a community—and the quotidian beliefs and ideas of the community—this, Goffman termed frame alignment. Essentially, this means that social movements, such as the redefinition of group identity, can only work when there is more or less some degree of compatibility between the new frame offered by the leaders and the frame of beliefs that define the daily life of community members.

Burdick (1998) also invokes Goffman's frame concept to demonstrate how a social movement, such as Brazil's *movimentos negros*, can use a set of ideas about African heritage and culture to construct identity claims:

The Brazilian black consciousness movement... expects nonwhites to pay special attention to their descent from slaves and African forebears, and to set aside their other ancestries; it calls upon them to reinterpret experiences once understood as having been shaped by personal idiosyncrasy or class prejudice as having been shaped by racism; it asks them to place a special value on their bodily response to drumming; while marginalizing their bodily response to, say, violins; it urges them to be especially appreciative of Afro-religious practices... while distancing themselves from the practice, say, of wearing the suit acquired in a Baptist church. (1998a:8-9)

Burdick's study reveals how Black forms of popular Christianity deal with the realities of racism in Rio de Janeiro and suggests that the *movimentos negros* are only able to see proud and liberating forms of Black expression in the African oriented space or *terreiros* of Afro-Brazilian religious practices, neglecting other Black cultural traditions. Militant Black leaders in Salvador similarly assert that

any Black man or women who truly wishes to combat racism, to subvert the myth of 'racial democracy' and to empower their own community, *must* begin by embracing the African elements of Afro-Brazilian culture. Specifically, this implies membership in a *Candomblé terreiro*, the principal form of Afro-Brazilian religious centre found in Bahia, involvement with an Afro carnival association and an expectation that Blacks will work towards public recognition of their descent from African forebears. For these movements, Black identity and Black community becomes much the same thing.

Black movements of this kind have been explored in detail by British sociologist Paul Gilroy. In *'There ain't no Black in the Union Jack'*, Gilroy (1987:234) suggests that for Black social movements in Britain, the principal context in which these kinds of ideas and demands are articulated is that of 'community'. He writes:

Though it reflects the concentration of Black people, the term refers to far more than mere place or population. It has a moral dimension and its use evokes a rich complex of symbols surrounded by a wider complex of meanings.... Community, therefore, signifies not just a distinctive political ideology but a particular set of values and norms in everyday life. (Gilroy 1987:234)

Black movements in Bahia similarly assert that the boundaries of the Black community must be defined by the common experience of subjugation and a need to escape from racism and the categorization of Blacks as a population that requires assimilation into the broader society. They argue that the elements that define Black communities in Salvador and in much of Brazil—the same elements

which compose their social 'frame'—are about antagonism between ethnic boundaries and about reconciling, internally, competing definitions of the Black movement and of community.

However, a frame can often fail to resonate with constituents and in some ways the present work is directed at uncovering the extent to which these new identity claims actually permeate the Black community in Salvador and beyond, into the rural area of Bahia. Elites and cultural entrepreneurs can often fail to understand that the quotidian and mundane aspects of 'real life' are generally far more important to an individual's existence than manifestations of religious performance or the nuances of identity. Further, contrary to Scott's (1985) assertions that the socially weak fill their lives with small acts of resistance to power not everything has to do with subversion and confronting domination. Many Black Brazilians are untouched or uninterested in the identity oriented discourses of Africanity offered by many of Brazil's Black movements. They see little in these ideologies that speak to their daily lives as impoverished and marginalised peoples. Hanchard puts it another way, asserting that "many of the working poor [in Brazil] do *not* have a 'hidden transcript,' that is to say, a strategic agenda of private, ideological interests that contradict public articulations of either consent of material compliance with dominant actors in a given society" (1994:71)

Even if participants of a particular social identity or members of a 'community' participate in some aspects a social 'frame' that speaks to an

ideology of change and resistance, they may openly reject others. Indeed, discourses that seek to activate ethnic identity are often extremely difficult to mobilize. As Gilroy writes: "The political rhetoric of leaders is, after all, not a complete guide to the motivations of those who play a less prominent role" (1987:234-236).

Interpretations of public manifestations, rituals, political rhetoric and, yes, even identity discourse, can run the gamut from excited and wholehearted support to unveiled indifference. Although we, as anthropologists, may be swayed by the inspiring speech of Black activists exhorting their 'people' to 'rediscover' their Blackness and their African heritage, it is our job to determine to what extent individuals, as lone actors and as members of a collective, embrace these ideas.

Methodology

This study is based on ethnographic fieldwork carried out in the state of Bahia in Northeast Brazil from September, 2004, through February, 2006, and on fieldwork in the West African coastal cities of Lagos in Nigeria, Ouidah and Cotonou in Benin, and Accra and Cape Coast in Ghana from January, 2003, through March, 2003. The pilot West African research for this project is part of my ongoing program of ethnographic inquiry and engagement with the cities of the Guinea Coast that started in 2001.

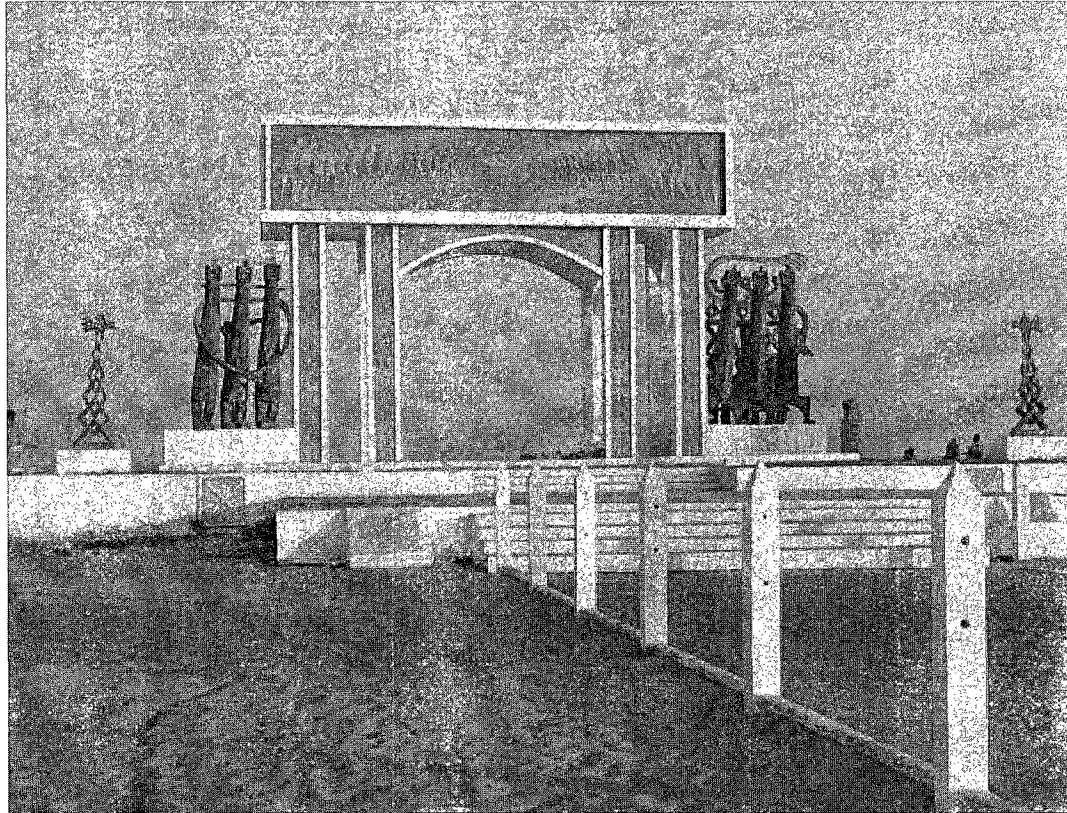


Figure 1.5 The UNESCO funded 'Point of No Return' Monument in Ouidah, Benin.

First Phase

The pilot research in West Africa attempted to follow the path of leaders from Brazilian and other Black American community groups and religious organizations engaged in so-called 'roots' tourism or cultural rediscovery trips to West Africa. These 'pilgrimages', if you will, primarily consist of group of tourists of African descent from the Diaspora and typically involve visits to sites along the Guinea Coast from Cape Coast and Elmina in Ghana eastwards to the former slave port of Ouidah in what is now the Republic of Benin to Lagos in Nigeria. These sites are usually home to slave forts or castles built by European powers that were involved in the trans-Atlantic slave trade such as the Portuguese,

Dutch, Danish, English, French and others. Most of these locations have now been made UNESCO world heritage sites as part of that organisation's Slave Routes project.³

What started as the informal movement of Black literati from the United States in the period after the first African nations achieved independence has been transformed into a structured tourist market that includes travel and tour companies in the Americas, Africa and Europe dedicated to providing an authentic 'roots' experience. The Ghanaian government emphasises the slave castles as master symbols of the country's connection to the slave trade and to the descendants of slaves in the Diaspora. To this are added Ghana's history of pan-Africanism, the legacy of Kwame Nkrumah and his long-standing interaction with Black American intellectuals and Ghana's place as the first independent nation in Africa. In Benin, the main attraction is the so-called '*route des esclaves*' or 'slave walk' which retraces the route taken by slaves from the central slave market in the town of Ouidah, where slave traders selected and purchased slaves destined for resale in the New World, to the embarkation point some four kilometres away on the coast. Slaves were branded according to the mark of the purchaser at what is now billed to tourists as the 'Tree of Forgetting'. Tourist literature available in Ouidah and interpretive material presented by guides

³ This initiative, proposed by Haiti and supported by the African Union and UNESCO, claims as its principal objective the global acceptance of the horrors of the Atlantic slave trade and slavery in general and an awareness of the historical consequences and interactions that have resulted from the slave trade (UNESCO 2008).

describes the tree as a place where slaves were forced to 'forget' their African homes. The slave walk continues along the coast until it arrives at the shallow water harbour where slaves were loaded onto longboats and taken out to the slave ships—here, there is now a large monument to the slave trade erected by UNESCO known as the 'Point of No Return'. Among Benin's attractions are also 'authentic' displays of Fon—the largest ethnic group in the region—religious activity and that tradition's connections with Haitian *Vodoun* and tours of the *Casa do Brasil*, the residence of a Brazilian slave trader. In Nigeria, slave tourism is little developed, owing primarily to security concerns in the country, but more adventurous 'roots' tourists are increasingly making their way to Lagos. Attractions include the Brazilian quarter where Afro-Latin slave returnees took residence and the 'shrine' of Afro-Beat musical pioneer, Fela Kuti.

Although these tourist routes are aimed primarily at affluent Black Americans, increasing numbers of travellers and tourists from other parts of the Americas are now visiting these Black cultural heritage sites in West Africa. A small, though growing, group of travellers from Brazil can now be found frequenting the slave route along the West African coast. In contrast to Black American tourists, these Afro-Brazilian groups are interested primarily in engaging the traditional religious practices of the Yoruba ethnic group and Fon/Ewe complex of the coastal region which stretches from the border between Ghana and Togo through to the Lagosian lowlands of Nigeria. Although much of their journey, like that of Black Americans, is oriented around the major slave

heritage sites, these travellers are primarily interested in contacting leaders and devotees of the different deity cults of the Yoruba, Fon and Ewe. To this end, Afro-Brazilian travellers can typically be found interacting with religious leaders in Lagos and Ouidah.⁴

Second Phase

Following pilot research in West Africa, extended ethnographic research in the Brazilian state of Bahia was focused on the city of Salvador and the rural town of Bom Jesus da Lapa.⁵

Interviews in Salvador were conducted in neighbourhoods throughout the city, including: Curuzu-Liberdade, Engenho Velho and Brotas, which are primarily

⁴ During this fieldwork period in 2003 I was able to speak to four tourist groups from Brazil involved in activities oriented towards slave history what the groups generally called “religious, cultural and historical rediscovery”. In total I conducted nineteen unstructured interviews with travellers who identified themselves as Brazilians who were members of an Afro-Brazilian religious congregation. Two of the groups were entirely composed of members from Salvador in Bahia. The other two groups were more diverse containing members from Salvador, São Paulo and Rio de Janeiro. I also participated in the ‘slave walk’ in Ouidah where I met two other groups of tourists that contained participants from Brazil and conducted an additional four unstructured interviews. I was also able to interview a number of hoteliers, tour guides and restaurateurs in Benin, Ghana and Nigeria. These unstructured interviews primarily covered perceptions of ‘roots’ tourism and what kind of services and information they offer to travellers and tourists from Brazil, the U.S. and other places in the Americas. I was also able to interview a number of hoteliers, tour guides and restaurateurs in Benin, Ghana and Nigeria. These unstructured interviews primarily covered perceptions of ‘roots’ tourism and what kind of services and information they offer to travellers and tourists from Brazil, the U.S. and other locales in the Americas.

⁵ Over the thirteen months spent in Bahia, I conducted a total of 211 unstructured interviews. 141 of these interviews were conducted in the city of Salvador, 28 were conducted in the city of Ilhéus, 27 in the town of Bom Jesus da Lapa and 15 in the town of Jacobina. The main method of transportation between towns in the very large state of Bahia is by intercity bus and more than a few unstructured interviews were conducted on buses—in these cases interview locations were recorded according to the home city of the informant. 89 of all interviews were conducted with women informants and 122 with men.

working class Black neighbourhoods, and the old town of Salvador called Pelourinho, where many 17th and 18th century buildings can still be found and which is oriented towards a tourist industry that celebrates Bahia's colonial past and the history of slavery. I also attended and interviewed people at Black consciousness rallies held at carnival associations, churches, the Universidade Federal da Bahia (UFBa) and Afro-Brazilian religious centres or *terreiros*; lectures and events held UFBa's Centro Estudos Afro-Orientais (CEAO); marches and public manifestations held throughout Salvador for the month of Black consciousness and to celebrate the memory of famed maroon slave leader Zumbi dos Palmares.

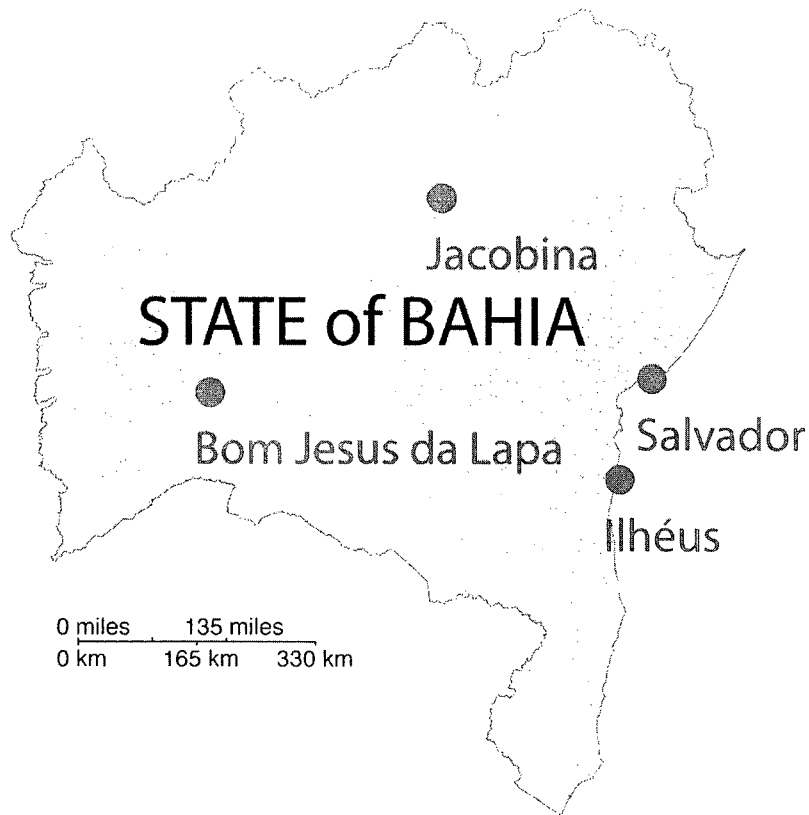


Figure 1.6 Map of the state of Bahia.

Another extremely valuable source of information during fieldwork were the interactions with West Africans living and working in Salvador. Included among these individuals were instructors of the Yoruba language at UFBa and Nigerian students studying in Bahia. This community also features a number of individuals from West Africa that have, through an array of extremely colourful experiences, found themselves living in Bahia working as: tour guides; interpreters; importers of West African artisan goods; and, occasionally, as impromptu priests and ad-hoc experts-for-hire on African—especially Yoruba—society.

Interviews conducted in the town of Bom Jesus da Lapa focused on rural perceptions of Salvador as the arbiter of all things Black and African in Brazil. Here, I also explored the extent to which a discourse about Africa and Black consciousness penetrates the interior of Bahia, beyond the confines of the so-called 'Black Rome'.

Outline of Chapters

Black communities in Salvador seek to employ an awareness and rediscovery of an African past as an important cornerstone of their interpretation of Blackness. The idea that this past can and does have consequences for contemporary Black communities in the Americas was one of the most important intellectual anchor points in the shaping of American cultural anthropology. A mainstay of this academic movement was the interrogation of the Afro-American *problématique*: understanding the history of Black America, the nature of life in

the slave plantation and the varied trajectories that Black American societies have taken. Anthropologists have been important interlocutors in the development of a discourse about the place of Africa in Black American identity and especially in the area of 'Africanisms' in Brazil. This debate will be explored in detail and scrutinized in chapter 2.

Chapter 3 continues the discussion of anthropological inquiry into Afro-America but moves beyond the era of Boas into an exploration of creolisation and African survivals. The work of early anthropologists and other social scientists throughout the Americas—a large number of whom were students of Boas—helped reclaim the past of Black peoples. However, in the latter half of the 20th century a debate would arise in anthropology that still rages today—to what extent did African populations in the plantation hold on to their culture? This debate will be explored in detail in this chapter as it has important analytical consequences for this entire work.

Matory (1999), Yelvington (2006) and others have suggested that that the importance of Africa in Afro-Brazilian racial discourse is not so much a product of foreign academics and Euro-Brazilian elites inventing Africa in Brazil but of a continued dialogue between Brazil and West Africa in the nineteenth and early 20th century (see Harrison 2006; Matory 2006; Price 2006a; Price 2006b; Prince 2006; Pulis 2006; Sengova 2006; Singleton 2006; Torres 2006; Wade 2006; Yelvington 2006a, 2006b). The nature of this dialogue was more than just mercantile. It also facilitated the transmission and reconfigurations of ethnic

identities, religious forms and ideas about origin and race. I contend in chapter 4 that continued or sustained dialogue is indeed the most useful ideological metaphor with which to understand the formation of African oriented Black identities in Brazil. An increasingly important vector in the ongoing dialogue between Africa and Black Brazil is the small, but incredibly influential, community of West Africans who are resident in the city of Salvador. Chapter 5 explores the place of these cultural entrepreneurs and the impact they have had on constructions of Africanised Blackness in Bahia.

Chapters 6 and 7 address the place of elites in Afro-Brazilian religious groups, Black community organisations, Afro carnival associations and academia in developing and directing Black identity discourse in Bahia. These stakeholders have been able to transform Africanised forms of Blackness from marginalised and oppressed social categories into a culturally dominant force in contemporary Bahia.

The Africanising discourse of the Black movements in Salvador is not monolithic. There are alternative forms and expressions of Black identity in Bahia—some of them explicitly celebrate the slave past while others revile and reject the place of Africa and slave traditions. All of these forms, however, find expression through forms of Christian worship. These issues will be explored in detail in chapter 8.

Chapter 9 takes the discussion out of Salvador and the immediate

surroundings of the Recôncavo. It discusses how the Africa-centric identity discourse informed by that city's history as a centre for urban slave revolt and as a major nexus point for both the trans-Atlantic slave trade and contemporary reconnections with West Africa is understood and viewed in the hinterland of the arid and bleak Bahian interior. Interviews conducted in the Bahian backlands, or *sertão*, suggest that the impoverished rural communities of Bahia do not always agree that their ethnic identity and their struggle to overcome racism should be rooted in Africa-centric identity discourse. Despite these views however, the *sertão* is home to one of the most important symbols of Africanising Blackness—the remnants of runaway slave or maroon communities. Maroon societies or *quilombos* are an increasingly important component of Black identity constructions in Brazil. The place of the *quilombos* in the broader identity debate will also be addressed in the context of rural perspectives on Blackness in this chapter.

In the final and concluding chapter I will illustrate why, based on the ethnographic evidence presented, I believe that the brokers and entrepreneurs of Black ethnic identity based in Salvador are interested in mobilizing a construction of Blackness in Brazil which focuses on Africa and 'Africans' as one of—if not the—principal trope of representation. I assert here that the ideological core of the Black movements in Bahia is to do away with multi-layered and fragmented categories of phenotype and colour and to increasingly adopt an approach to Blackness that emphasises what in North America has been termed hypo-

descent—a model where one ‘drop’ of Afro-American blood or ancestry is enough to make a person Black. These activists and elites within the Black community in Salvador believe that in order for Brazilians of Black descent—of whatever degree—to break the cycle of racism and internalized victimization they *must* come to value their connection to Africa or, at the very least, come to know what Africa means to Black society in the Americas.

Chapter 2: Reclaiming the Past—Anthropology and the Afro-American *Problématique*.

What is Africa to me?
Copper sun or scarlet sea
Jungle star or jungle track
Strong Black men or regal Black
Women from whose loins I sprang
When the birds of Eden sang?
One three centuries removed
From the scenes his father told
Spring grove, cinnamon tree
What is Africa to me?

Countee Cullen, *Heritage* (1925:36)

In this stirring verse, Countee Cullen, one of the luminaries of the Harlem Renaissance evokes the image of a wild and verdant Africa, a place of fertility and life where the Black American could find home. In almost all of his work about race and colour in America, Cullen asserts that all descendants of African slaves are forever strangers in the New World, exiles from Africa, both geographically and spiritually. For Cullen, Africa was a place where Black men and women were kings and queens—proud and free. More importantly, Cullen provided Black Americans—long considered a people without history—with the powerful image of beautiful past in a mythical, ‘remembered’ Africa.

Cullen had no first hand knowledge of Africa (Davis 1953:390) and perhaps it was not required to express the Black America’s connection with this mythical homeland. But if he, as part of the cosmopolitan Harlem literati in the 1920s, had

no first hand knowledge of Africa as a place, how much less do the populations of the Recôncavo, the rural interior of Bahia, or the urban neighbourhoods of Salvador, Bahia's bustling state capital, know of Africa as an actual place? Surprisingly, however, more than one might expect, given that large numbers of Brazilians, and especially Bahians, live in considerable poverty.

Many individuals in Salvador and other small towns throughout Bahia can quickly respond with words such as 'Yoruba', 'Nigeria,' 'Angola,' 'Biko,' 'Mandela' or 'Selassie' when asked what they know about Africa. Moreover, there is the sense that for some, these words carry important meanings for those who are Black. Why? For many it is because these places and names and the societies they denote are important parts of their religious practice. For others it is because they are actively involved in political movements that seek equality and opportunity for the Black people of Brazil, especially in the less industrialised and underdeveloped Northeast. Finally, for many it is because the 'Africanness' of Afro-Brazilian culture and of Brazilian culture in general is now so ubiquitous, processed, sold, commoditised and re-presented in so many different ways—from popular soap-operas or novelas to beer advertising, from popular musical artists such as Caetano Veloso and Gilberto Gil to the ultimate stereotyped expression of Brazilian life, *carnaval*—that 'Africanismo', if you will, has become as Brazilian as *bossa nova* and football.

However, before we begin to address the way in which Black society in Brazil has and continues to engage the idea of Africa it is necessary to trace the

origins of this transatlantic dialogue. One of the most important intellectual anchor points of this interaction was the artistic, sociological and anthropological movement against racism in the United States and the shaping of American cultural anthropology. There are others, to be sure, but the ferment of ideas about Afro-American identity and the concomitant intellectual genealogy of Black writers and social scientists that developed in the United States had far-reaching consequences for how Black society in the Americas would, I contend, understand its relationship with Africa.

Currently, anthropology has become extremely focused on process: transnationalism; globalisation; migration; commodity exchange; group membership; resistance; development; coloniality; agency; positionality; translocality and hybridity have all become important tropes and figures within which anthropological work is inscribed and is given analytical freshness. Invariably however, these approaches can only be celebrated as new paradigms if much foundational intellectual inquiry is either rejected out-of-hand as being too much entangled with colonial enterprise or other equally distasteful associations, or simply wrong-headed, or is just ignored altogether. Michel-Rolph Trouillot (1991) has warned, most profoundly, of the dangers of an overly narrow and hazy understanding of the history of anthropology and the role of anthropology in making history. Rather than focusing on the metaphors of text and post-modernity, as the Writing Culture (1986) school has done, anthropology must ultimately be more concerned with coming to terms with its historical place in the

making of 'other' cultures.

In the area of Afro-American anthropology, this warning has particular resonance, as anthropologists have been instrumental in guiding the in situ construction of identity and discourse about ethnicity in Black communities throughout the Americas. In his 2001 review of Afro-American anthropology, Yelvington quite rightly notes that much of this "older" anthropology has been drawn on by "disempowered communities of Blacks in the New World to justify their place within nationalising processes" (2001:250). Consequently, regardless of how out-of-date such ideas as survivals, retentions, purity or even that old saw, syncretism, might seem, it is vital to understand the impact these ideas have had on the communities we study. In discussing Afro-Cuban *Santería* or *regla ocha*, Palmié notes that "'natives' are well aware of the conceptual and narrative constructions scholarly producers of knowledge about their religion have foisted upon their religion" and that locally produced non-scholarly histories inevitably must address conceptions created by academics and propagated within popular culture (1995:82-83). I would argue that the form these rejoinders to scholarly constructions take, certainly in the case of Brazil, invariably reframes the same ideas about the purity of African tradition laid out and inculcated into popular culture by an earlier generation of anthropologists. We must therefore begin with a discussion of how anthropology has guided both the study of Afro-America and the forms of cultural expression found today within its societies. As Jamaican anthropologist David Scott writes:

What is noteworthy is that even in non-anthropological discourse, anthropology, taken as the (self-described) 'science of culture,' is often seen as crucial in providing the authoritative vocabulary in terms of which the claims of difference are established.

Anthropology—and for quite definite historical reasons, American cultural anthropology more specifically—has often taken as providing what we might call the foundational discourse for the culture political of identity among peoples of African descent in the New World. (1991:262)

Boas and Africans in the Americas

In the early 20th century in both Brazil and the United States, those responsible for articulating—both in the academy and in the arena of government policy—the historical and social issues pertaining to the communities brought about by the enslavement of millions of sub-Saharan Africans, were students of or were profoundly influenced by the work of Franz Boas. In the United States, Melville Herskovits, one of Boas' most famous students, would come to have a broad and far-reaching impact on the development of African and African American studies. He also worked alongside, invariably with considerable tension and often on divergent paths, with the intellectual and artistic leader of Black America's quest for identity in the early 20th century, fellow Boasian, W.E.B Du Bois. These two students of Boas, though often poles apart in their views about the future of Black society in America, were united in their joint fight against pseudoscientific racism (Gershenhorn 2004:68) and belief in the "psychic unity of humankind" (Harrison 1992:240) and went on to influence a generation of anthropologists, activists and politicians including Ralph Bunche, St. Clair Drake, Zora Neale Hurston, Alain Locke, Kwame Nkrumah, Paul Robeson and others.

Boas and his students firmly placed “scientific racism on the defensive” (Harrison 1992:241) and both Boas and Herskovits were outspoken critics of racial and ethnic discrimination based on Darwinian or socio-biological ‘evidence.’ The most important contribution that Boas made to this fight was his displacement of ‘race’ as the primary figure through which social science wrote and talked about social difference and the introduction of the concept of culture.

Boas argued that all cultures are distinctive and could only be analytically comprehended in terms of the particular historical forces that have served to integrate different traits from without and within into a discernible whole. Consequently, it is not surprising that Boas and subsequently, Herskovits, attempted to place Black American culture in proximity to an “anthropologically rehabilitated representation” of a past rooted in the African continent (Scott 1991:270). In a now famous commencement address at Atlanta University in 1906, given at the invitation of Du Bois, Boas exhorted the audience of Black graduates to be proud of the regal past and innovations of their African forebears:

I regret that we have no place in this country where the beauty and daintiness of African work can be shown; but a walk through the museums of Paris, London and Berlin is a revelation. I wish you could see the sceptres of African kings...this picture of native Africa will inspire strength. (1982:313)

Du Bois (1939), in *Black Folk Then and Now*, would later reflect on just what a profound impact Boas’ words had on his own understanding of the past:

Franz Boas came to Atlanta University where I was teaching history in 1906 and said to the graduating class: You need not be ashamed

of your African past; and then he recounted the history of black kingdoms south of the Sahara for a thousand years. I was too astonished to speak. All of this I had never heard and I came then and afterwards to realise how the silence and neglect of science can let truth utterly disappear or even be unconsciously distorted. (1939:vii)

Lewis notes that prior to the 1906 Atlanta address, Du Bois held a powerful, if somewhat nebulous, belief in the historical importance of Africa for Black society but that Boas' speech supplied the intellectual "reinforcement" that Du Bois needed to begin a scientific examination of the importance of both primordial and contemporary African society and its relevance to Black America (1993:352).

Despite the efforts of Boas and his students to generate an antiracist movement among social scientists in the first half of the 20th century, it was Du Bois who truly led the battle against racism in the American academy (Lewis 2000:477). This often brought Du Bois into direct opposition with Herskovits, who believed that Du Bois was interested almost solely in racial uplift and activism rather than in science (Gershenhorn 2004:106). Du Bois, although not ultimately as influential within the narrow disciplinary confines of anthropology as Herskovits, would impact the work of a number of very prominent Black American anthropologists, among them, St. Clair Drake, Irene Diggs and Allison Davis.

St. Clair Drake (1980, 1982, 1987; 1971) has written extensively on the influence of Boas on the work of Du Bois and also the influence that Du Bois would have on Afro-American social science. He suggests that the Atlanta

address placed Boas very much in line with and buttressed the vindicationist⁶ work of Black intellectuals such as Du Bois that sought to combat oppression and racist thought justified by Darwinian evolutionism (Drake 1980:12). Drake (1980:12) also notes that Du Bois and other vindicationists such as Carter Woodson consumed much contemporary anthropology and helped popularise the discipline amongst the Harlem intelligentsia, but only did so in that it served their own social and political ends of mobilisation and advancement of Black people. To be sure, Du Bois used anthropology in a very instrumental manner, bending it to his own needs, but in so doing he helped to diffuse Boasian ideals about how other societies should be regarded and understood. Further, Du Bois' work as a social scientist was widely respected by intellectuals from Europe. When Max Weber visited the United States in 1904 he specifically arranged to meet with Du Bois and would later include an article, the only one from an American social scientist, by Du Bois in *Archiv für Sozialwissenschaft und Sozialpolitik* (Lewis 1993:224).

Du Bois and his students at Atlanta University also produced some of the earliest ethnographic studies of Black American society (see Harrison 1998; Lange 1983; Taylor 1971). These early experiments, essentially native urban

⁶ Vindicationist scholarship "sought to combat social Darwinist anthropology" and Tylorian evolutionism but converged with anthropology after Boasian ideas of cultural relativism and historical particularism revolutionised the discipline (Drake 1980:12). Moreover, vindicationist philosophy was primarily concerned with recovering the contributions of Black peoples to the history of world societies.

anthropology, such as the work in Black Philadelphia neighbourhoods published while Du Bois was still in training at the University of Pennsylvania and later material from Atlanta, emphasised fieldwork, were critical of armchair philosophising and always incorporated a very Boasian approach to social science and anthropological methodology (Du Bois and Gates 2007).

Another anthropologist upon whom the influence of Du Bois was profound was the Latin American specialist Irene Diggs. Diggs studied anthropology at Atlanta University and received her Masters degree under the supervision of Du Bois in 1933. During the 1940s Diggs pursued her doctorate under folkloricist Fernando Ortiz in Cuba where she developed an interest in 'continuities' of African elements in Latin American society (Harrison 1992:245). Boas' and Du Bois' continued influence on Diggs scholarship appears in her Cuban work and in her later work in South America. Here, Diggs (1953) performed some of the first anthropological work on the now iconic figure of Zumbí dos Palmares in Brazil. Zumbí, the leader of the Palmares *quilombo* or maroon community, is now considered a national Black hero in Brazil and the namesake for a number of charities, foundations and even pop groups in Brazil that articulate and promote ideas about the place of Africa and African slaves in Afro-Brazilian identity. Zumbí, *quilombos* and the movement to gain retroactive property rights for these rural maroon communities has become a major part of the agenda of the *movimento negro* in Brazil, a development I will discuss in greater detail in chapter 9. In her Brazilian research, some of the first on that country's maroons,

and in her Cuban work, Diggs remained a strong advocate of Black vindicationist scholarship (Harrison 1992:245). This is nowhere more apparent than in her Zumbí research:

Vanquished, separated from the land which with such bravery and intrepidity they had defended, the blacks had lost the freedom that with such courage they had sought to preserve. There remains of their struggle and heroism a name, Zumbi of Os Palmares, sonorous as the tambores (drums) that in the night brought to those still in slavery the rebellious message of their free brothers of the quilombo. (Diggs 1953:70)

Diggs would also serve as an important bridge between Ortiz and Du Bois. Ortiz, like Du Bois, had been very influenced by the Boasian approach to culture and he rejected the idea of biological race outright. However, Ortiz (2002) would eventually reject, with the support of Malinowski, the Boasian concept of unidirectional acculturation in favour of the rhetoric of multiplex transculturation in his influential work *Contrapunteo cubano de tabaco y el azúcar* [*Cuban Counterpoint: Tobacco and Sugar*]. In this work, Ortiz, in a vein similar to that pursued by intellectually kindred spirits in Latin America, José Vasconcelos in Mexico and Gilberto Freyre in Brazil, propounded the idea of *un ajíaco cultural* [a cultural stew] or the blending, transformation and mutual inter-penetration of “uprooted Old World cultures” (Palmié 1995:76). Diggs’ work blended Ortiz’s research on the social life of *La Cultura Afrocubana*, a term Ortiz himself coined, and Du Bois’ concurrent stream of investigation into Black American society and is reflected in her early mentor’s increasing interest in the life of Black people beyond the borders of the United States (Vega 2000:42). Diggs’ doctoral

dissertation for Ortiz was dedicated to Du Bois and Du Bois himself wrote the introductory paragraph (Vega 2000:43).

Since meeting Boas in 1906, Du Bois had steadily worked in the United States to promote a vindicationist philosophy in the academy, in his magazine, *Crisis*⁷, and amongst the artists and literati of the Harlem Renaissance (Lewis 2000). Whether as a product of America's unique experience with the 'peculiar institution', the high level of movement and displacement among American Blacks as a product of North–South migration during the Civil War or as a result of America's own particular brand of racism, Afro-American society in the United States came to be something quite different from what could be considered 'mainstream' society in America. A consequence of this difference and in response to increased calls for greater assimilation during the war years, Black intellectuals in America—from Du Bois to the back-to-Africa populism of Marcus Garvey and the early rumblings of Pan-Africanism—became increasingly interested in reclaiming an African past for Black American society. No longer would Black scholars and leaders blindly accept that Afro-Americans had no past or no culture.

It was into this intellectual space that Melville Herskovits entered in 1923

⁷ *Crisis* was the official print organ of the National Association for the Advancement of Coloured People (NAACP) and was established in February, 1909. The magazine was named after a popular poem, *The Present Crisis* by James Russell Lowell (1890). W.E.B. Du Bois edited the magazine.

with his doctorate from Columbia University under the supervision of Boas. Based on research done at Columbia and in the personal library of Du Bois (Gershenhorn 2004:23), Herskovits' (1926) work focussed on pastoral societies such as the Nuer, the Dinka, the Maasai and others, all roughly configured into the so-called 'East African cattle complex'. Following the first World War, increased nativist sentiment in America led many biologists and physical scientists to reject Boasian ideals about culture (Gershenhorn 2004:27). This conflict between adherents of culture theory and biological racialists prompted Boas' students to engage in studies on acculturation and culture groups and to "buttress his [Boas'] own interpretative position" (Gershenhorn 2004:28). Herskovits proposed a study of Black American society in Harlem, West Virginia and Washington, DC, that tried to determine the extent to which Black Americans in the United States were the product of mixed ethnic descent and intended to use interviews and genealogies obtained from informants along with anthropometric data (Gershenhorn 2004:29). To facilitate this research, Herskovits cultivated contacts in Black communities, largely through introductions made by Boas, but also at the editorial offices of *Crisis* magazine where he would often confer with Du Bois (Gershenhorn 2004:32). Among the contacts that Herskovits made was Alain Locke, a Black American philosopher who would later invite Herskovits to contribute to his 1925 volume *The New Negro*, and Zora Neale Hurston, a Black American writer whom Herskovits convinced to stand on a street corner in Harlem to interview people about their heritage and to measure

them with a pair of callipers in hand. Hurston, trained as an anthropologist, would become another literary bright light of the Harlem Renaissance and an intellectual forebear to generations of female Black American writers including Alice Walker, Toni Morrison and Maya Angelou, all of whose continued literary work and activism emphasises discovery of an African past for Black American men and women (Gates and Appiah 1993).

Herskovits' use of anthropometry amongst Black communities created many problems, most especially when he attempted to measure the student body of Howard University. But above all, this work was intended by Herskovits to demonstrate that perceived differences between the so-called white and Black races were too few as to really consider the use of physical traits and biological inheritance as a viable way of categorising human beings. Du Bois lauded the work of Herskovits in this area and took Herskovits' assertion that most Black Americans were of mixed descent as confirmation that so-called 'mulattos' were not—as many racist beliefs held—weak and feeble. However, Du Bois railed against and heavily criticised Herskovits suggestion that Black America was “just like any other American community—the same pattern, only a different shade” and that Blacks had completely assimilated into American culture (1925:353)

In the wake of severe criticism from Du Bois, Carter Woodson and others, Herskovits began to slowly reassess his conception of acculturation and assimilation into the mainstream (Gershenhorn 2004:65-66). Herskovits' assimilationist inclinations in his studies of Black Americans in Harlem and

elsewhere were motivated primarily by the influence of Boas and his desire to completely abandon the idea of difference on the basis of physical and biological traits—to abandon the concept of race. However, these influences, combined with his doctoral studies on East Africa, also led him towards accepting the idea that history and its impact on culture, specifically Afro-American culture, could also be important in understanding Black American society.

Two important factors need to be explored to understand this shift in Herskovits' perspective and to understand what Price and Price (2003:78) have called the birth of Afro-American anthropology: Du Bois' criticism and the influence of the Harlem Renaissance along with the profound effect of his first two summers of fieldwork in Suriname. Du Bois' criticism and the ideas of cultural pluralism that were circulating during the Harlem Renaissance led Herskovits to consider the possibility of "Black cultural distinctiveness" and the extent to which an African past influenced these differences (Gershenhorn 2004:67). Du Bois (1995:20-27), heavily influenced by German romantic philosophers such as Herder, whom he had read during his time studying in Berlin, had long embraced the idea that Afro-American society had unique contributions to make to the betterment of all peoples of the African Diaspora and that, for American Blacks to realise this potential, they must avoid assimilation into white American society. Du Bois later redefined and refined this view in his 1903 work, *The Souls of Black Folk*, in which he embraced a more modern view of American Blackness. Here, Du Bois suggests that the future for all Black Americans is not one of separation

or integration but rather of dual identity:

It is a peculiar sensation, this double-consciousness, this sense of always looking at one's self through the eyes of others, of measuring one's soul by the tape of a world that looks on in amused contempt and pity. One ever feels his twines—an American, a Negro; two souls, two thoughts, two unreconciled strivings; two warring ideals in one dark body, whose dogged strength alone keeps it from being torn asunder. The history of the American Negro is the history of this strife.... He would not Africanize America for America has too much to teach the world and Africa. He would not bleach his Negro soul in a flood of White Americanism, for he know that Negro blood has a message for the world. (1989:5)

Herskovits would not be truly stirred by these words—the same ones that defined the flowering of literary, artistic and political expression that was the Harlem Renaissance—until the late 1920s when he formulated plans for a long-term study of what he would term the African origins of the “New World Negro” (1930). This reawakening impelled Herskovits to undertake his first season of fieldwork in Dutch Guiana (now Suriname) with his wife Frances. This fieldwork amongst the Saramaka, Frances would later write, profoundly influenced Herskovits’ perspective on Afro-American society:

In the Guiana Bush, among the Saramacca peoples, he saw, as he often told his students, nearly all of western sub-Saharan Africa represented, from what is now Mali to Loango and into the Congo—and the Loango chief who came to our base camp invoked both the Great God of the Akan of the Gold Coast, Nyankopon, and the Bantu Zambi. (1966a:vii-viii)

During this research, and during subsequent, albeit very short (Gershenhorn 2004; Price and Price 2003), fieldwork seasons in Suriname, Dahomey (now Benin), Haiti, Trinidad and Brazil, Herskovits would lay out an anthropology of the

African Diaspora and demonstrate that the distinctiveness of Afro-American society was a product of an authentic African heritage. The Suriname fieldwork would produce the 1934 volume *Rebel Destiny: Among the Bush Negroes of Dutch Guyana*, a work that was essentially a comparative study of the Saramaka, or 'bush negroes' as Herskovits called the people living in the interior tropical forest, and the locals of Paramaribo, the capital city. The city dwellers were, for Herskovits, less likely to have retained African traits because of their long association with Europeans whereas those in the bush, the Saramaka, represented "Africa of the seventeenth century" (1934:x).

During his time in Suriname, Herskovits started to elaborate a scale of how 'African' he perceived certain Afro-American societies to be. Placing the Saramaka at one end and Black Americans at the other, Herskovits schematised the degree to which he perceived Afro-American societies had retained their African past and by extension, the extent to which particular African traits had 'survived' within present day Afro-American societies. Committed now to detailing the African character of all Black societies in the Americas, Herskovits became intent on consuming as much Afro-American ethnographic material as he possibly could.

Herskovits had already corresponded with the Black Haitian sociologist Jean Price-Mars prior to his trip to Suriname, requesting references to his material on Black Haitian society (Yelvington 2006b:54). Price-Mars studied sociology and anthropology in Paris, and upon his return to Haiti, he

'rediscovered' *Vodoun* and subsequently emphasised the importance of an Afro centric Black identity for the Haitian people (Apter 1991:252). Price-Mars urged Black Haitian society to emulate the Harlem Renaissance, and he saw anthropology as a means of inculcating ideas about African heritage into popular consciousness. He would later establish the Institut d'Ethnologie in Haiti where he taught 'Africology' (Trouillot 1956; Yelvington 2006b:52). Herskovits and Price-Mars continued their correspondence during Herskovits' brief fieldwork in Dahomey, during which he sent Price-Mars some of his early writings on the West African chiefdom, commenting that Price-Mars would find familiarities in these descriptions to the people of Haiti (Yelvington 2006b:57).

Herskovits also sought out the work of Ortiz in Cuba and through these exchanges came to produce his statement on the anthropological and historical 'problem' of Afro-American society in *The Negro in the New World*:

It is quite possible on the basis of our present knowledge to make a kind of chart indicating the extent to which the descendants of Africans brought to the New World have retained Africanism in their cultural behaviour. If we consider the intensity of African cultural elements in the various regions north of Brazil (which I do not include because there are so few data on which to base judgement), we may say that after Africa itself it is the Bush Negroes of Suriname who exhibit a civilisation which is the most African. As a matter of fact, unless the observer omitted to take their language into consideration, and unless he were familiar with small elements obtained from the whites with whom these people were in contact while they were in slavery and the Indians whom they drove out of the Guiana bush, he would assume, at first glance, that their culture was wholly African. (1930:149)

In addition to Ortiz in Cuba and Price-Mars in Haiti, Herskovits would also

communicate and exchange ideas with the Brazilian psychologist and anthropologist, Arthur Ramos. Ramos had studied medicine in the northeastern Brazilian city of Salvador with an emphasis on psychoanalysis. While there, he was a student of Raimundo Nina Rodrigues who, in the early 1900s, sought to apply theories of anthropometry and physical anthropology to issues of criminal behaviour, social malfeasance, and racial differences in intelligence in Brazil. Rodriguez saw the presence of Black society in Brazil as a problem to be solved and that the overwhelming 'difference' of Black society contributed greatly to Brazil's social ills. To this end, Rodrigues pursued 'anthropological' research into the African 'tribal' origins of Black and mixed descent Brazilians or mulattos, essentially founding the school of Afro-Brazilian anthropology (see Borges 1993; Nina Rodrigues 1899, 1932, 1939).

Arthur Ramos would attempt to substitute the mistakes of his mentor's use of anthropometry with theories of psychoanalysis (Carneiro 1951:76), as he was profoundly influenced by both Freud and by the French psychologist Lucien Lévy-Bruhl (1923), who had asserted that the 'savage' construction of the universe was a product of a mentality rooted in mysticism and irrationality. The reason, Ramos suggested, that Afro-Brazilian society should be seen as primitive was not because of any biological and physical conditions but rather because certain mental traits had 'survived' the Middle Passage and remained present in the consciousness of Brazilian Blacks (Romo 2007:44). Ramos was interested both in the continuities of African survivals across the Atlantic but also in the

psychological processes that allowed for the combination and fusion of cultural traits—essentially, a syncretic paradigm (Apter 1991:236).

Ramos was a colleague and contemporary of Brazilian historian, Gilberto Freyre, and was very much involved with bringing Freyre's work to the attention of Herskovits. The 1933 publication of Freyre's *Casa Grande e senzala* [The Masters and the Slaves] marked the introduction of Boasian ideas about culture into the Brazilian academy and a shift away from Nina Rodrigues' views on race mixing or *mestiçagem* and an emphasis on the cultural effects of mixing and fusion. Freyre gave African and indigenous contributions equal weight alongside those of Portuguese society in the construction of Brazil as a nation. Moreover, Freyre insisted that although many Brazilians retained elements of the African in their daily cultural practice, the African contributions of Black Brazil would ultimately disappear through continued *mestiçagem*. Freyre received his Master's degree under Boas at Columbia University in 1922 (Romo 2007:32) and in his preface to *Casa Grande*, Freyre cites Boas as the primary influence on the formation of his conception of Brazilian society. From Boas, Freyre would write that he had:

Learned to regard as fundamental the difference between race and culture, to discriminate between the effects of purely genetic relationships and those resulting from social influences, the cultural heritage and the milieu. It is upon this criterion of the basic differentiation between race and culture that the entire plan of this essay rests, as well as upon the distinction to be made between racial and family heredity. (1956:xxvii)

Freyre, like Boas, was very much opposed to racism and ideas of racial

superiority but also, as Lehmann notes, attached a certain value to constitutive ethnic groups in Brazil staying “in tune” with their heritage—for Freyre, “racial mixture is an unconscious affair”, almost ‘naturally’ wending its way through the fabric of Brazilian society (2008:215). These ideas, as articulated in *Casa Grande*, would become forever attached to Freyre as the foundation of the idea of Brazil as a ‘racial democracy.’ Ironically however, even though the concept of racial democracy is usually attributed to Freyre and the ideology that stemmed from this concept belonged very much to him, particularly with reference to *Casa Grande*, Freyre never, it appears, used the phrase himself (Lehmann 2008:210; Levy-Cruz 2002).

In 1934, Freyre invited Herskovits to attend the inaugural Afro-Brazilian Congress in his hometown of Recife (Romo 2007:37). This event would bring together leading scholars of Afro-Brazil to debate the importance of an African past to current day Brazilian identity at a time when the ideas of Nina Rodrigues and others about biological racial categories in Brazil were being seriously questioned, largely due to the work of Boas. Herskovits was informed by Freyre that the conference would seek to study the traces of African influence in the culture of Brazil through the use of ethnography, folklore and sociology (Romo 2007:37). Herskovits did not ultimately attend the 1934 congress, but was present for its second gathering in 1937 in Salvador. The Boasian conception of acculturation that so influenced Herskovits’ early work guided Freyre’s emphasis on African origins in organising the Afro-Brazilian Congress. The papers

presented at the conference by Freyre, Ramos and anthropologist Edison Carneiro—who would later become a vocal and strident activist for Afro-Brazilian religions and an associate of Ruth Landes—and others focused on unearthing pasts, on the institution of slavery, and on the nature of *mestiçagem* in Brazil. French sociologist Roger Bastide, whose work on social memory and the transmission of Africanisms in Brazilian religion has been extremely influential would write that this first Congress would “lay the foundations for a distinctive Africanology” in Brazil (1974:12).

Through his connections with Boas, Freyre was familiar with Herskovits and had used his early work on the so-called ‘culture areas’ of Africa (Herskovits 1924) in *Casa Grande* in an attempt to demonstrate that a large number of slaves brought to Brazil were from the more Islamised—and therefore more ‘civilised’—West African Sahel, Guinea Coast and Voltaic regions as opposed to the more ‘backward’ southern African Bantu populations (Freyre 1956; Romo 2007). These assertions place Freyre at the heart of a debate that continues to rage today on the exact ethnic composition of the slave population of Brazil and about which groups within that population were ascendant. However, for Freyre, the African origins of Brazil’s Black population were simply another component of the ethnic melange that was Brazil. Blackness in Brazil, as both a cultural and phenotypic construction, was not being erased by continued intermarriage and procreation, but rather was continuing to embrace not Africanity, but a growing Brazilian national identity. Freyre saw little use in tracing African—he believed the era of

Brazilian slavery, as experienced by both the masters and those they enslaved, was the formative period in which Brazilian society was created.

Ramos was also connected to Herskovits through his knowledge of and interaction with Fernando Ortiz in Cuba. Ramos had read much of Ortiz' work on the Afro-Cuban *regla ocha* or *Santería*, as had Herskovits, and had used Ortiz' material as comparative support for his assertion that the pre-eminence of the Yoruba deity *Shango*, or *Xangô* in Brazilian *Candomblé*, was a consequence of the movement of the *Xangô* hero myth out of the realm of localised Yoruba fetishism into the larger context of Brazilian life. *Xangô* had become Brazilian and, for Ramos (1934), a point of interface and cultural blending: syncretism.

Much of Ramos' work was conducted during the early 1930s. During this period, the ruling military junta of Gétúlio Vargas, which had come to power in 1930, started to emphasise the importance of programs that promoted, at least superficially, Brazilian nationalism. Part of this shift in state policy was the adoption of a model of a Brazilian 'racial democracy'—which was increasingly being associated with the ideas of Freyre—that highlighted the contributions of all of Brazil's cultures, including the legacy of African slaves. During this era, Ramos, like Freyre and Rodrigues, was preoccupied with the ideas that the Black population of Brazil was not racially inferior but that their cultural praxis, particularly in the area of religion, was backward. For Ramos, the problem impeding the advancement of Brazil as a truly modern nation was not an issue of racial inferiority or inequality but rather one of all consuming class differentiation.

As Kelly Hayes puts it, Ramos saw that the problem was not “the nation’s African blood” but the ‘magical’ mode of thinking of its lower classes (2007:299; Ramos 1971). Ramos categorised religion into a Tylorian evolutionary schema with religions like Catholicism as more advanced and more heterodox or eclectic forms as less advanced. Of the Afro-Brazilian religious forms found in Brazil, Ramos (1934) saw the Yoruba form or Nagô *Candomblé*—as a product of the hierarchical polities of the West African coast—as the most advanced and the so-called Bantu forms of witchcraft or *feitiçaria*, such as *Macumba*, common in Rio de Janeiro, as more retrograde. Here, Ramos is again attempting to essentially resuscitate Nina Rodrigues’ ideas that the Black Brazilian’s idiom of thought was essentially backward and unscientific but that within this community there existed levels of sophistication, with the Yoruba or Nagô form of religious practice at the apex. However, what is different from Ramos’ account is the use of the syncretism concept to describe how the different Afro-Brazilian religious forms—*Candomblé*, *Xangô*, *Umbanda*, *Macumba* and others—differed in sophistication based on perceived degree on African purity.

Based on his studies, Ramos (1971:103-104) proposed to divide African ‘survivals’ in Brazil into three categories: a) Sudanic cultural traits introduced by Yoruba, Fon (Dahomey), Akan, Ewe and other Guinea Coast societies; b) Sudanic cultural traits introduced by Black Muslims, primarily those from the Hausa-Fulani complex; c) Bantu cultural traits introduced by societies from the areas of Angola, Congo and Mozambique. In discussing the eclectic *Macumba*

forms found in Rio, Ramos writes:

A Macumba dos Negros brasileiros é religião e ritual mágico. Sobrevivência de cultos africanos, a Macumba transformou-se no Brasil e adquiriu formas novas, mesclando-se às crenças religiosas e mágicas que encontrou em seu novo território...A Macumba é mais que tudo isso: é a expressão da religiosidade primitiva dos Negros do Brasil. (1971:104)

[The *Macumba* of Black Brazil is religion and magic ritual. A survival of African cults, *Macumba* changed in Brazil and took on new forms, mixed religious beliefs and magical forms that it encountered in this new land...more than this, *Macumba* is the primitive religious expression of the Black Brazilians.]⁸

In this line of argument, Ramos also replicates Freyre's division of Africa between the more 'complex' northern states that existed on the interface with Islamised North Africa and the supposedly less 'sophisticated' southern Bantu, a schematisation that Freyre had drawn from Herskovits. *Candomblé* in Bahia, Ramos wrote, had preserved or guarded the original Sudanic traditions, had preserved a high degree of African purity and had therefore maintained an ordered, 'civilised' system of belief, whereas *Macumba* and even the more popular Afro-Brazilian form, *Umbanda*, also found primarily in Rio de Janeiro and the Southeast, had degenerated into syncretic disarray. In this schema, Hayes (2007:301) notes, Ramos frames religious legitimacy in terms of the purity of African origins.

The importance of finding 'pure' African forms in Brazil would set the stage

⁸ Translated by author.

not only for how the literati and academy of Brazil would orient itself towards the *terreiro*, the meeting place of an Afro-Brazilian religion, but towards the African legacy in Brazil in general. Participants at the second Afro-Brazilian congress, organised by Carneiro in 1937, drafted a policy document and petition requesting that *Candomblé* be recognised by the state government of Bahia as the religious heritage of African slaves and that practitioners be free from persecution (Dantas 1988:190-193). As Hayes (2007:298) notes, the more that these 'pure' Yoruba forms of African praxis were championed by intellectuals and devotees, the more other eclectic and heterodox forms were decried as degenerate or pejoratively labelled as syncretic. Significantly, Nina Rodrigues, Ramos, Carneiro, Ruth Landes, later Roger Bastide and Pierre Verger and, more recently, Harvard anthropologist, J. Lorand Matory, have all focussed their studies on a small circle of *Candomblé* communities or *terreiros* in Salvador which include the famous houses of Casa Branca and Ilê Axé Opô Afonjá (Bastide 1978; Carneiro 1948; Landes 1947; Matory 2005; Nina Rodrigues 1932; Ramos 1971; Verger 2002). This network of scholars, community leaders and religious devotees spans generations. This patronage has ensured that these houses have become particularly rich and famous with the consequence that the accounts of informants within these privileged houses have been disproportionately represented in the ethnographic record.

Ramos' focus on the purity of African survivals had a profound impact on Herskovits. At the suggestion of Freyre, Ramos contacted Herskovits and sent

him a number of publications and letters. In return, Herskovits sent a contribution to the second Afro-Brazilian congress in 1937 (Yelvington 2006b:65). The Herskovitses (1941:xxii) would then go on to conduct fieldwork in Bahia in 1941-1942 and would wholly adopt Ramos' use of the word syncretism to describe the presence of African cultural traits in Afro-American religious forms and cultural practice. They undertook six months of fieldwork in Bahia and one month in the southern city of Porto Alegre. Of his time in Brazil, Herskovits (Herskovits 1943; Herskovits and Herskovits 1942) writes of finding many African 'survivals' in the various religious forms found throughout the country but also in culinary traditions, liturgical languages and patterns of work and social co-operation.

The ethnographic evidence for Herskovits was overwhelming. The research and insights of Ortiz, Price-Mars and Ramos, not to mention Du Bois, Hurston, Freyre, Locke, Diggs and others, had come together to form an increasingly more complex and elaborate network of knowledge and ideas about the nature of Black communities in the Americas oriented towards a search for African origins and survivals. In the case of Du Bois, arguments and assertions about an African past would be used not only to mobilise political action and dissent, but also to generate a transnational movement that would connect American Blacks with the imagined homeland they evoked in poems like Cullen's in a very real way—through Pan-Africanism. For Ortiz and Freyre, the African legacy was emphasised as part of a broader program of nation building and integration. Further, each of these scholars appeared to be connected by more than just

mutual interest in Afro-America. Du Bois, Ortiz and Diggs all maintained a long correspondence with each other, as did Herskovits and Ortiz, who referred exceptional students to each other, including Katherine Dunham, a student of dance and anthropology whom Herskovits recommended to Ortiz so that she might pursue a comparative study of African religious dances in the Caribbean (Vega 2000:44). Herskovits would also go on to train three Brazilian students and contemporaries of Ramos in anthropology at Northwestern University (Yelvington 2006b:65).

A number of scholars have written extensively about what a poor fieldworker Herskovits was, how he often wrote authoritatively about places he had never been to, places in which he had spent very little time, or had only heard about second-hand; also his less than stellar linguistic skills are frequently mentioned (Gershenhorn 2004; Price and Price 2003; Yelvington 2006b). During the 1940s, Herskovits quickly became something of impresario of all things African and African Diaspora related in the American academy. From his imperial style of control over the beleaguered Encyclopaedia of the Negro project through the formation of the African Studies Association (ASA), Herskovits invariably sought to eschew political and anti-racist activism in favour of the advancement of scientific knowledge—an approach that frequently brought him into direct and sometimes rather personal conflict with Du Bois, with whom he invariably claimed to also be on good personal terms (Gershenhorn 2004:123-167). There is also good evidence to suggest that Herskovits was involved in blackballing Ruth

Landes after her return from Salvador due to a conflict with Ramos over her relationship with Carneiro (Yelvington 2006b:74). To be sure, his flaws were many. But he also succeeded, guided by Boas' ethnohistorical approach, to organise and define a sub-field of anthropology and the Afro-American *problématique*. Until Herskovits, the Black person in the Americas had been primarily constructed as someone without a past or a distinctive culture and since Africa was accepted as the 'source', at least physically, of all Black peoples brought to Americas, Herskovits created an anthropology which sought, as Scott (1991:279) puts it, to "demonstrate, by an effort of corroboration, the remnants of that past in the cultural traits of contemporary Negro societies".

Chapter 3: Debating the Past in the Plantation

Herskovits and Frazier

Herskovits and Du Bois, working within the context of a network of thinkers, writers, scholars, philosophers, activists and anthropologists that stretched from Harlem through the Caribbean into the heart of South America, helped to restore Africa, as both an actual place and as a potent symbol of memory and identity, to the Black populations of the Americas. However, in the latter half of the 20th century, a debate emerged that attempted to define the extent to which Africa and discrete African societies influenced the composition and culture of slave populations.

For Herskovits, Africanisms, as they existed in different Afro-American societies, offered a point of continuity with the past and were representative of Black communities resistance to the destructive effects of the enslavement process. The concept-metaphor of syncretism, as deployed by Herskovits, in which an African cultural trait existed in fusion with some aspect of the 'master's' culture, argued for the "psychological resilience" of enslaved African societies towards brutality, made possible by a "deep-rooted African tradition of adaptation (1948:10).

Often standing in opposition to Herskovits positions was Howard professor

of sociology, E. Franklin Frazier. Frazier, born into a Black neighbourhood of Baltimore and a fighter against racial injustice throughout his career, emphasised, in contrast to Herskovits, the traumatic and deracinating effects of slavery on the Black populations of the Americas (Davis 1962). Although he praised Herskovits for undertaking his study of African and Afro-American culture, he dismissed Herskovits' work as speculation and conjecture with little in the way of actual scientific proof (Frazier 1942:194-196). Frazier argued that the structure of American society made it impossible for Blacks to have maintained any shred of African culture beyond the first few generations on the plantations and that ultimately, the descendants of slaves had gradually assimilated into newer, American cultures. For Frazier, "never before in history has a people been so nearly completely stripped of its social heritage as the Negroes who were brought to America" (1939:21).

However, the division between Frazier and Herskovits' positions has been overstated. M.G. Smith (1957:34-46) argued that African heritage study in the Americas and Caribbean could benefit from Herskovits' comparative approach to cataloguing Africanisms, but only if this perspective were complemented by a framework that understood quotidian social interaction and took a more nuanced and localised appreciation of the differences in slave communities and the experience of slavery in different parts of the Americas and Caribbean. Smith was suggesting, essentially, that Frazier and Herskovits' stated positions were closer and more complementary than they were divergent. Indeed, Frazier

(1939:5) admitted that African survivals did exist in the area of religion in Latin America and Herskovits never really neglected the profound impact that the process of enslavement had in stripping Black Africans of cultural elements, stating that slavery robbed Africans, to differing extents depending on historical context, of the broader patterns of social life such as patterns of exchange, subsistence strategies and political authority (Yelvington 2001:232).

Nonetheless, these two contrasting perspectives have in large measure dictated the trajectory of African Diaspora scholarship in the Americas. The differences in viewpoint have often been over-exaggerated by partisans of a debate that is frequently constructed as a concatenation of this early dispute in Afro-American scholarship: the neo-Herskovitsians or Africacentrists versus the creolisation theorists who largely adhere to the model forwarded by Sidney Mintz and Richard Price of rapid integration and homogenisation of slave populations to create new, creolized American societies.

As Yelvington (2006a:11) notes, there are a number of caveats in framing all Afro-American anthropological scholarship within the confines of this debate. The first of these was discussed in detail in a previous chapter: that Herskovits did not single-handedly create the field of Afro-American anthropology, with its emphasis on uncovering the African past, but was instead influenced and, in the case of Ramos, presaged by a network of scholars, many of them Black, working throughout the Americas. Secondly, as Yelvington (2006b), Apter (1992a) and Gershenhorn (2004) have noted, more has perhaps been made of the perceived

opposition between Herskovits and Frazier than actually existed. This perspective is supported through a brief examination of Herskovits' and Frazier's public debate on the nature of the Black family in Bahia in the years 1942 and 1943.

In a series of articles and rejoinders, Herskovits and Frazier, both of whom conducted very limited fieldwork in Bahia and relied heavily on the material collected by Ramos and Carneiro, debated the nature of marriage and domestic arrangements among Black families in this Northeast state (Frazier 1942, 1943; Herskovits 1943). Frazier (1942) asserted that African patterns of family life had rapidly disintegrated under Portuguese slavery and that whatever elements of so-called 'African' culture that had survived in Bahia were more a part of folklore and held no rigid or clear form that could be definitively identified as originating in a particular region of Africa. Herskovits (1943:402) responded by asserting that in Bahia, as in other areas of Afro-America, the process of acculturation invariably meant that 'cultural traits' will invariably manifest themselves with a great degree of variability and flexibility and that this variability does not imply demoralisation or degeneration. He writes: "The Afro-Bahian family manifests traits peculiar to it, but these are the results of accommodation to an acculturative situation, and are not a sign of demoralization." (Herskovits 1943:394)

In Frazier's rejoinder (1943), he quibbles over who correctly translated Portuguese phrases used in the *terreiro* such as *mãe de santo*, and is concerned over the status of particular informants. However, hidden away at the end of his

rejoinder is Frazier's frank admission that some practices of African origin existed and persist within the arena of Afro-Brazilian religion: he states "that there can be no dispute" about the presence of African survivals in the *Candomblé terreiro* (1943:404). Herskovits and Frazier agreed that many Afro-American societies had retained African elements—the dispute between them rested more on the impact these so-called survivals had on daily life and, more importantly, at what level of culture they functioned. Herskovits, by joining with Ramos in a quest for African purity, had cast a die in which 'Africanisms' in American societies were measured against each other for form and character. Frazier had simply responded by saying that the effects of slavery had been such that any practices carried across the Middle Passage would necessarily be found, decades or centuries later, in variable or fragmented states. More than anything, the debate was about degrees of difference

Africa-centrists and Creolists

In its usual framing, the work of Mintz and Price is often associated with Frazier's side of the perennial debate and is often held in contrast to the work of Africa-centric historians such as Gwendolyn Midlo Hall, Michael Gomez and John Thornton. For Mintz and Price (1976), the process of enslavement—starting with the capture of individuals from diverse regions such as the Voltaic highlands of the Sahel or the coastal forests of the Bight of Benin, continuing to the imprisonment of slaves in the forts and dungeons of the Guinea coast and their subsequent journey across the ocean, finally ending in sale into forced labour on

the plantations—resulted in ethnically “heterogeneous crowds” of Africans, forced to live in close quarters in communities that contained individuals who not know each other’s customs, languages, traditions, marriage patterns or beliefs. These communities were unable to reconstitute whole African cultures or complete African practices due to reasons such as the separation of kinship units, the loss of ritual officials or paraphernalia, and the destruction of patterns of traditional authority. Africa-centric historians who assert direct continuity between present day Afro-American practices and their African forebears suggest that this position coincides with what they believe was Frazier’s assertion that slavery destroyed African cultures; however, Mintz and Price’s work sought to revise and to add to Herskovits’ legacy by arguing that the African origins of particular cultural practices in American societies are less important than the social role that said practices performed in the maintenance of community solidarity and in the creation of meaning. Mintz and Price write

It is less the unity of West Africa as a broad culture area that is called into question...than the levels at which one would have to seek confirmation of this postulated unity [and that] a West African cultural heritage, widely shared by the Africans imported into any new colony, will have to be defined in less concrete terms, by focusing more on values, and less on sociocultural forms, and even by attempting to identify unconscious ‘grammatical principles’, which may underlie and shape behavioural response. (1976:5)

By “grammatical principles”, Mintz and Price refer not to commonality of religious practice, ancestor veneration or ‘traits’ which Herskovits could check-off on a schema of Africanisms but rather basic assumptions about the way the world works, at a phenomenological level, and “certain common orientations to

reality” (1976:6). In this, it seems, Mintz and Price have found the common ground that appears to have eluded Herskovits and Frazier. An important concept in Herskovits’ syncretic paradigm for analysing survivals and retentions was what he called “cultural imponderables” (Herskovits 1966b:59). Doubtlessly indebted to Malinowski’s (1922) *Argonauts*, these ‘imponderables’ include linguistic patterns, musical styles, motor habits and codes of etiquette. Most important here is that Herskovits conceived of these ineffable characteristics as inherently conservative ‘traits’ that resisted change. These ‘imponderables’ form, to some extent, the baseline ‘grammatical’ principles that Mintz and Price claim as the cohesive and creative substrate behind the formation of new Afro-American societies.

In the Mintz and Price creolisation model, the basic ‘grammatical’ similarities between individuals from West and Central Africa who found themselves working side-by-side in the plantations lent themselves more to inter-African syncretism than to the syncretism of master and slave cultures. This marked the beginning of what Trouillot (1998) has called the ‘miracle of creolisation’. Slave communities could only become that—communities—through a process of cultural change in which almost all social institutions had to be invented by them (Mintz and Price 1976:22-26). Although Mintz and Price are careful to emphasise that regional, environmental and historical specificity were important factors that needed to be taken into account when seeking to apply this model to an understanding of different Afro-American contexts, they do assert that some discernible and

recurrent patterns existed in slave societies throughout the Americas: African cultures and the heterogeneity of the slave population encouraged a high propensity to borrow in a creative way from the array of cultural traditions as opposed to conservatively guarding practices brought across the Atlantic; the process of enslavement encouraged the emergence of societies whose cultural practices were flexible and open to change; and, perhaps most importantly, 'indigenous' Afro-American cultures started to develop quite rapidly after the first arrivals from Africa.

It would be difficult to underestimate just how influential this model has been in the field of Afro-American anthropology and the extent to which it has further polarised scholars of Afro-American societies. Paul Lovejoy perfectly articulates the problems that Africa-centric scholars have with the Mintz-Price model:

The creole model assumes that African history did not cross the Atlantic because the enslaved population was too diverse in origins to sustain the continuities of history. Disjuncture is the key concept...For creolists...'creole' inevitably meant the 'Europeanization' of the oppressed slaves...I would argue that the concept of creolization as usually applied is Euro-centric, emphasising how African culture becomes subsumed and amalgamated under slavery into an 'American' mold that reinforced the domination of people of European descent.... Backgrounds are minimized through the metaphor of the crowd and the symbolism of blending, but assumptions are being imposed on the historical reconstruction that at least should stand the test of documentation.... The emphasis on change, which anthropologists have sometimes interpreted in terms of 'process', is central to historical methodology, but that method requires verification. (1997:17,24,26)

For the most part, these issues have come under fire and have been the

subject of the fiercest debate among historians of slavery in the Americas. But regardless of which side of the debate scholars fall on, the Mintz and Price model brought questions that were once considered purely anthropological to broader scholarship on Afro-America. Questions such as “How ethnically heterogeneous or homogenous were the enslaved Africans transported to various localities?” or “How quickly did new arrivees integrate into the already established and evolving community? —Essentially, the question, “how quickly did they creolise?” now underpins much of the historical inquiry into slavery in the Americas.

Further, the idea of creolisation and in particular the Mintz-Price approach to this phenomenon has also found considerable traction in the areas of archaeology, bio archaeology, cultural studies, ethnomusicology and medical anthropology and linguistics (see Benoît 2000; Bilby 1996; DeCorse 1999; Gilroy 1993, 1994; Posnansky 1999; Singleton 1995, 2006; Yelvington 2006a). In the area of archaeology, De Corse (1999), Singleton (1995; 2006), Posnansky (1999) and others have employed forms of the creolisation model to better interpret the material culture remnants of former slave plantations. The musical heritage of the Americas is one that was, for the most part, born of the unique co-mingling of African, European and Amerindian musical styles. Creolisation theory has provided scholars such as Gilroy (1994), Evans (1999) and ethnomusicologists with new insights into how unique styles such as jazz (United States), samba (Brazil), cumbia (Colombia) and other forms originated. Linguist and educator Joko Sengova (2006) has turned to the creolisation model to better

understand how the Gullah/Geechee cultural identity and linguistic patterns developed in South Carolina—a turnaround, given that the Mintz-Price model drew so heavily upon linguistics. Indeed, throughout the Americas, linguists have turned to social models of creolisation to better understand creole and pidgin language formations (Jourdan 1991).

Criticism of creolisation tends to come from scholars who either implicitly or explicitly identify themselves as neo-Herskovits in orientation (Gomez 2006; Knight 2006; Reis 2006). These critics, most of them historians, emphasize that African ethnicities endured in spite of the brutality of the Middle Passage and life on the plantation, and invariably cast their historical arguments in a vein not dissimilar to the vindicationist scholarship of the 1920s. For them, demonstrating that African ethnic groups persisted in the Americas is positive proof of the resilience, strength and nobility of African cultures.

Their work is also given added impetus by projects such as the UNESCO international slave route project, the growing prevalence of so-called ‘roots’ tourism (in which Afro-American tourists and travellers from North and South America with the financial means visit sites important to the history of the slave-trade in the Americas and West Africa), and the popularity of Afro-American popular culture in which images and ideas of Black empowerment and an African homeland are invoked. Their work, and these projects are also driven by a keen awareness that, throughout the Americas, racism still exists and is a fact of life for many Afro-Americans. The Africa-centric approach provides an alternative

discourse, a non-American discourse, one rooted in Africa—albeit an Africa that few Americans know, as the opening verse by Cullen suggests—in which African cultures remained identifiable, stable, and salient.

The continued ‘invention’—or rather, continued discovery and rediscovery—of Africa in the Americas by Africa-centric scholars appears to proceed in very close association and collaboration with human rights groups; religious communities; UNESCO; and governments⁹. Among the reasons for the existence of these many excellent programs are anti-racism work, multiculturalism, the remembrance of slavery, urban renewal, social justice and racial equality. Naturally then, the work of scholars engaged with these projects and organisations also promotes and advances these causes. However, this is problematic on two fronts. Firstly, those who criticise the Africa-centric approach to interpreting the variable forms of slave communities in the Americas are unnecessarily and unjustly cast in a light which suggests they are opposed to initiatives such as slave reparations or to ‘roots’ tourism and, moreover, seek to downplay the importance of Africa in the creation of American societies and nations. Further, this viewpoint, although it addresses the American past, has

⁹ The government of Ghana is conspicuous here. As mentioned earlier, Ghana is home to a number of the most well developed tourist sites of slave-history: the coastal castles of Cape Coast and Elmina. With these forts as the centrepiece, along with Ghana’s pre-eminent role in the history of pan-Africanism and the rehabilitation of the legacy of Nkrumah over the past twenty years, Ghana has helped launch The Joseph Project (<http://www.thejosephproject.com>). This initiative builds on the popularity of roots tourism and African reconnection in the Diaspora and seeks to boldly place Ghana at the centre of a renewed—though this time, tourism-focused—‘Back to Africa’ movement.

obvious consequences for how these authors and groups view the Afro-American present.

In a 2006 PBS documentary entitled *African-American Lives*, noted professor of African-Studies Henry Lewis Gates, Jr. (2006) used DNA analysis on prominent Black American celebrities such as Whoopi Goldberg and Quincy Jones to trace their genetic material to specific regions of Africa and to even suggest that these individuals are descended from particular ethnic groups that inhabited that part of Africa during the time of the slave trade. The implication is that these individuals, any individual, of African descent looking to reconnect with their African heritage needs to know, precisely, where in Africa their descendants came from. Is this phenomena simply part of the urge that so many people in the Americas have, most of whom do not originate there, genetically speaking, to find out 'where they are from'? Or is there another process at work here? Of course, someone raised in New York or Atlanta, Havana or Salvador, Kingston or Port-au-Prince has very little in common with someone who has born and raised in northern Cameroon and western Niger—two of the locales that celebrities in Gates' documentary discovered their genetic 'stuff' comes from—other than perhaps the experience of poverty. I contend that part of what is happening in projects that emphasise the precise ethnic starting point of many Black American societies forms part of the overall Africa-centric line of argumentation—that the trajectories of African ethnic groups had real consequences:

The argument, I would suggest, goes something like this:

- I. From the beginning of the African slave trade until its universal abolition in the Americas, certain regions and ethnic groups were disproportionately represented in the dungeons and slave forts of the Guinea Coast, in the holds of the slave ships and in the plantations of the Americas.
- II. Over time, certain ethnic groups and their cultural practices gained precedence, popularity or dominance in the plantation communities and came to be seen as generally representative of African tradition in the new American societies.
- III. To overlook or to discount the importance of those particular ethnicities is to downplay the 'strength' and/or resilience of African culture in general and the relative 'Africanness' of American societies.
- IV. The distinct ethnic groupings that were transported to the Americas and Caribbean had a continuing influence on the formation of Afro-American societies.

Gwendolyn Midlo Hall (2005) in *Slavery and African Ethnicities In the Americas: Restoring the Links* best articulates this approach:

But these early cultures were not simply abstract, African American cultures. They were quite distinct regional cultures, which developed in response to an array of factors, including the patterns of introduction of Africans over time from various regions and the clustering of various African ethnicities arriving from Africa in waves. (2005:169)

Invariably however, as in the work of Herskovits, Ortiz and Ramos, the argument returns to ethnographic contexts in which the examples of preserved cultural practices are typically religious institutions that incorporate the traditions of a few select West African groups. Whether they use the Yoruba deities found in *Candomblé* and *regla ocha* or the Ewe and Fon aspects of Haitian *Vodoun*, interpretations that propose that African ethnicities had and continue to wield a powerful influence over contemporary configurations of Afro-American society invariably use similarities found in religious traditions extrapolated to theories

about the ethnic origins of entire Black American societies. This is a problem of conflation that I deal with in a subsequent chapter, but, put succinctly, it is poor reasoning to assume that simply because elements of a religious form are replicated in a community, we should assume said community is in some way a representative or bearer of that entire *culture*.

If it does not rely on contemporary religious forms, this kind of butterfly-collecting—which does not differ too much from Herskovits' work—usually turns to anecdotes and tales mined from the historical record intended to bolster assertions about African ethnic groups. To cite an example, Hall writes:

Of the total number of slaves reported in the 1731-1732 censuses, I estimated that about 15 percent of the slaves in Louisiana were Bamana ('Bambara')...they were clearly overrepresented among those accused of 'crimes' including running away, conspiring, and revolting against the French regime. Testimony was taken from the accused as well as from other persons, white and black, slave and free. Their testimony reveals a network of mainly Mande language group speakers belonging to several different masters in and around New Orleans (2005:97-98)

These anecdotes, about language ability in this case, do little to substantiate that all slaves being referred to in this instance were necessarily of Bambara origin. In contemporary West Africa, when one travels along the bumpy roads between Dakar, Bamako, Ouagadougou, Abidjan, Accra and Lagos, and encounters people from all walks of life, of all ages, the facility with which people easily slip from one language to another is often striking, even to a bi- or tri-lingual individual. Young girls and old men alike can often move with ease from Akan to Dagbani to Mossi to Hausa to Yoruba, not to mention English and

French, in their conversations with other travellers. One of the principal vectors of this kind of linguistic intrepidity was the spread of Islam across the West African landscape and the expansion of the Hausa-Fulani complex. These and other religious and military movements have made and continue to make West Africa a melange of intersecting and cross-cutting ethnic collectivities where patterns of exchange, trade and political authority are in constant flux. Consider the Gonja of northern Ghana, a large paramount chieftaincy on the northern border of the Asante. In the early 17th century, Gonja was invaded by a conqueror described as being “Mande” in origin who swept across the land of the two Volta rivers installing his relatives as chiefs, taking Gur-speaking farmers such as the Konkomba, Bmoba and Basari as slaves—later to be sold to the Asante as tribute—and solidifying the spread of Islam into the Voltaic region (Stainland 1975; Wilks et al 1986). Throughout the 17th, 18th and 19th century, the West African ethnoscape was in such a degree of flux and reflux that to suggest, on the basis of a Louisiana jailor’s records of linguistic ability, that we can clearly determine the ethnicity of discrete slave communities in the plantations seems tenuous at best.

João José Reis makes even more potent claims in his *Rebelião Escrava no Brasil*, which interprets the circumstances surrounding the 1835 slave revolt in Salvador, Bahia, instigated primarily by slaves identified as ‘Malês’ or Hausa:

Os escravos, libertos e livres ‘de cor’ nascidos no Brasil representavam pouco menos de 40% da população da cidade...Eles não participaram da rebelião de 1835. Um deles, o

escravo Antonio, roceiro, queixou-se durante interrogatório que... Sendo ele crioulo, protestava, como podiam prendê-lo por uma insurreição de africanos? A ausência do negro brasileiro na rebelião de 1835 não deve surpreender. Crioulos, cabras e mulatos não participaram de nenhuma das mais de vinte revoltas escravas baianas anteriores a 1835. (2003:319-320)

[Freed and free slaves of colour, born in Brazil, represented less than 40% of the population in the city.... They did not participate in the revolt of 1835. One of them, a plantation worker, complained during interrogation that, being Creole, how could he be connected with an insurrection by Africans? The absence of Brazilian-born blacks in the 1835 rebellion should not surprise: Creoles, *cabras*, and mulattos didn't participate in any of the more than twenty slave revolts in Bahia prior to 1835.]¹⁰

Reis (2003:215) asserts that only African born slaves were responsible for the slave revolts in Bahia because this community was composed of slaves like the Yoruba or Nagô who brought with them a military tradition of opposition and resistance and the Malês, literate because of Islam and able to establish *redes rebeldes*—networks of resistance. To be sure, there were slaves transported to Brazil in the first half of the 19th century who practiced Islam, who actively proselytised and helped to spread this religion throughout the slave sector in Bahia and in other cities in Brazil (Da Costa e Silva 2001). However, Reis' (2003:327) relies heavily on the *Rol dos culpados*, a document in the *Arquivo Público do Estado da Bahia* listing all those responsible for the revolt, in citing the exact ethnicity of slaves. The *Rol* notes ethnicity as *Nagô*, *Haussá*, *Jeje*, *Congo*, *Angola* and so on as ethnic groups and also lists in precise percentages the numbers of each who were enslaved or freed.

¹⁰ Translated by author.

The problem with using these kinds of sources is well documented. As both Nishida (1998, 2003) and Curtin (1969) have shown, sale into the transatlantic slave trade meant the imposition of a host of new identities by slave traders on all those enslaved. In the case of Brazil, this meant appellation with a new Christian/Portuguese name but also entailed registration, if you will, of a 'nationality' or 'nation'—*nação*. These *nações* were based on one of two criteria. Either the name came from the port from which slaves were shipped or, alternatively, the name of a *nação* was based on linguistic similarity. For example, the Mina ethnic group among the Brazilian slave population originated with those slaves who were boarded onto a slaving vessel at the fort of Elmina, now just outside the modern Ghanaian city of Cape Coast. By contrast, all those who spoke some form of what is now known as the Yoruba language were referred to as Nagô. Europeans encountering societies on the West African coast identified these so-called nations with perceived similarities in physical features, scarification, language and these characterizations of slave types persisted through the 20th century in colonial Brazil (Nishida 2003:31). Enslaved Africans in Salvador gradually adopted these ethnonyms as categories of self and group identification. But to what extent did these new identities coincide or dovetail with the colonial administrators and *fazendeiros*¹¹ schema of ethnic classification? Reis himself provides the answer, but yet still adheres to the strict categorization laid out in the *Rol*—In describing the case of a slave named Joaquim, he notes:

¹¹ *Fazendeiros* are the landed owners of *fazendas*, or large agricultural or ranching estates

“sua nação é Nagô, aliás Mina; e que sabe a lingual de nagô” [his nation is *Nagô* and incidentally *Mina*; and he knows the language of the *Nagô*] (2003:329). Reis does not assert that these were locally constructed or instrumentally bounded categories but rather that they were representative of discrete ethnic groups that were transported to Brazil from Africa where they persisted.

I argue, then, that to properly understand the ways in which Africa is configured and incorporated into Black ethnic identity in a country like Brazil, we must take as a starting point a society that has undergone creolisation in a mode not unlike that suggested by Mintz and Price. It seems clear that discrete African ethnicities were certainly present in the varied slave populations of Brazil, Cuba and other regions, but how long did they last? If ethnic categories, either those of the masters or the slaves, are a product of arbitrary, flexible and fluid notions of identity, how useful is it to assert that a particular percentage of a population was composed of one ethnic group or another? No, it seems clear that the most useful collectivities to address in understanding Afro-American ethnic identity are the societies that emerged from the plantation. These creolized societies were created in the social space of the slave sector, where heterogeneous groups of enslaved African invented new American societies and re-invented what Africa meant in an American context. This model does not overlook or discount the ability of African ethnic groups to withstand the savages of slavery but rather highlights the inventiveness and resourcefulness of these communities whilst enduring the enslavement.

In his *The Invention of Africa*, V.Y. Mudimbe (1988) illustrates how the concept of Africa was invented and used—or abused—in the European imperial enterprise and also explores how a discourse of Africa was pervasive not only in colonialism but also formed the basis of African nationalist movements, Pan-Africanism, African scholarship and development. This discourse about Africa is manifested at three levels: a primary or popular level where founders and founding events are mythologized; a second-level or academic discourse about Africa where the first level is inscribed into a rational field; and a third-level or meta-discourse—a history of histories. It is at this third level, where one can ask, as Cullen did, “What is Africa to me?”, and the level at which this present research operates. I invoke Mudimbe here, but also Hobsbawm and Ranger (1983), since this research and the work of Mintz and Price implies the active intentionality and agency not only of those enslaved communities out of which grew Afro-American society, but also of the academics in the 1920s and 1930s who were responsible, in Brazil anyway, with inventing much of what the concept of Africa means to Afro-Brazilians in Bahia. This work acts somewhat as a history of history in Afro-Brazil, as a meta-discourse about the ways in which power brokers and intellectuals have told and continued to ‘tell’ people in Brazil how to inject ‘Africa’ into their collective self-identities. It also seeks combine this approach with an exploration of how Afro-Brazilians have continued to self-consciously construct traditions which they label as ‘Black’, ‘African’, ‘Yoruba’ or ‘*afro-descendente*’.

I would also like to follow David Scott's proposal that anthropology should attempt to shift the *problématique* of Africans and their descendants in the Americas away from a "sustained preoccupation with the corroboration or verification of authentic pasts" (1991:280). Scott's proposal that anthropology relocate away from narrative constructions of history to the discursive field of 'tradition' and how it is transacted in the politics of identity has obvious relevance for a project that seeks to understand how a concept such as 'Africa' has been invented and reinvented in the Brazilian context. Scott suggests that anthropological work on Afro-America should be concerned primarily with interpreting the varying ways in which "Africa and slavery are employed by New World peoples of African descent in the narrative construction of relations among pasts, presents and futures" (1991:280-281). However, I, like Price (2006a:134), am not enough of a post-modernist to be willing to ignore the past in the plantation, or the history of trans-Atlantic interaction or the evidence left from the brutalities of the Middle Passage. Taken together, these fragments of the past help us to understand how the discourses of the present are formed.

An approach to Afro-Brazil identity and contemporary social processes that focuses on how the 'Africa' concept is used is not incompatible with accepting that Black societies in Brazil are largely a product of creolisation. Indeed, this approach, as suggested by Scott, almost requires that creolisation be accepted as a historical baseline or starting point. Understanding how 'Africa' and 'slavery' are used in identity discourse is about the creation of ethnic categories and social

boundaries with meaning and resonance for constituent members. The formation of new Black American communities in the context of the plantation through the use of shared grammatical principles and ideas about the universe—brought from Africa—was similarly about the creation of meaning.

Finally, Trouillot's warning that "as social theory becomes more discourse oriented...historical circumstances fall further into a hazy background of ideological preferences" is well taken (1998:15). Both 'event' and 'discourse' have their place and it is the job of the anthropologist to find the theoretical middle ground, much like M.G. Smith suggested, that bridges the two. For at stake, ultimately, in this debate is 'who is empowered to define what it means to be Black in Brazil, to be an *afro-descendente*, the extent to which being Black in Brazil means having a connection with Africa, and to whom these definitions of Blackness do or do not apply.

Chapter 4: Dialogue, Creolisation and Globalising Blackness

In a 1935 issue of *New Republic*, Melville Herskovits (1935) asked the question 'What has Africa given America?' Ultimately, what this question can be understood to mean is 'what have the Americas received or inherited from Africa as a legacy of trans-Atlantic slavery?' It is a question that has influenced decades of research into the presence of Africans and their descendants in the Americas and it has both necessitated and helped to refine a Boasian concept of culture in the service of a search for practices in modern American society that could be termed 'African'. We have already examined in detail what this search for African type practices meant for the development of Afro-American anthropology. Another important consequence is that this model leads to the theoretical assertion of a 'full-stop' or 'temporal cap' being placed on the history of African connections with the Americas, specifically at the time of abolition and the end of the slave trade. Consequently, much of the work that followed Herskovits' question viewed contemporary representations and manifestations of America's African legacy from, as Yelvington (2006b:3) points out, a decidedly diachronic perspective with the era of the plantation and, essentially, modern America as the two principal historical points of analysis.

Another major trend in African Diaspora studies in the Americas has been

the quest to find the exact combination, the precise admixture, of African and European rooted cultural traditions invented in the Americas that were ensnared by the construction of a Black identity in terms of their relationship with “class, nation, region, and language” (Yelvington 2006a:3). In this movement, the development of Black identities in the Americas were viewed as part of a dialectic with the “forms and mechanisms of oppression” on one hand and the development of identity—articulated by race—on the other. This most aptly described the anthropological *œuvre* of W.E.B Du Bois and vindicationist scholarship, beginning with his seminal 1903 work, *The Souls of Black Folk*, through his collaboration with Herskovits on the *Encyclopaedia of the Negro* (1946) project and the powerful impact he had on the architects of African independence.

In Brazilian ethnography of Black society, this dialectical approach finds voice in the work of Ruth Landes, Edison Carneiro, Julio Braga and members of the Centro de Estudos Afro-Orientais (Centre for African and Oriental Studies) at the Universidade Federal da Bahia. Indeed, in much of this Brazilian work these two approaches, diachronic and dialectic, seem bound up and inextricably linked with each other. Landes (1947), in *City of Women*, guided by a feminist perspective that privileged the power and spiritual superiority of women that practiced *Candomblé*, attempted to show how this feminisation of Black cultural space also had very potent consequences for ideas of Black identity in Bahia at large. Embedded in Landes’ interaction between female agency and Black

identity is a conception of African (read: Yoruba) cultural heritage, manifested in all of the wondrous and rich complexities of the *terreiro*, that connects Bahia of the 1930s with the life of the plantation. This connection was lost somewhere in time and separated from today by a temporal gulf during which the veil of Catholicism overlaid the African. Similarly, in Carneiro's *Candomblés da Bahia*, the amateur ethnographer and folklorist asserts:

Dos sessenta e sete Candomblés matriculados na União, trinta e sete eram dirigidos por pais e trinta por mães. Parece, porém, que nem sempre houve pais e mães e que, antigamente, o Candomblé foi, nitidamente, um ofício de mulher... Ainda agora, os nomes de mulheres são mais importantes do que os homens, na chefia dos Candomblés. (1948:104-105)

[Of the sixty-seven *Candomblé terreiros* registered in the Union, thirty-seven of them were directed by men and thirty by women. It would appear, however, that none of them ever had men *and* women and that, in the past, the office of *Candomblé* leader was a role for women... Even now, the names of women are more important than those of women in the headship of *Candomblé terreiros*.]¹²

The overlap of the dialectical and diachronic perspectives that Yelvington identifies is clearly represented in both Landes and Carneiro's attempts to feminise Black identity struggles in Bahia using the history of the plantation and an imaginative interpretation of Yoruba 'culture' as a foundation.

Julio Braga, a *babalorixa* (Yoruba priest) of *terreiro* Axeloia in Salvador and also an anthropologist, was a long-time director of the influential Centro de

¹² Translated by author.

Estudos Afro-Orientais (CEAO), in Bahia's capital. CEAO has long been an important locus for all things African oriented in Salvador since its inception over forty years ago and it serves as an intellectual home to many scholars working in Bahia on issues pertaining to the state's historical connections with Africa. Perhaps most importantly, CEAO offers courses in Yoruba instruction for Bahians, often taught by visiting Yoruba scholars from Nigeria.

Braga's work, like that of many of his colleagues at CEAO, emphasises the repression and persecution of the *terreiro* and other expressions of Black identity during both the colonial period and in the 20th century. CEAO writers form a key block of contemporary Brazilian intellectuals engaged in actively defending and participating in aspects of Afro-Brazilian culture. Braga writes that the political repression of the Afro-Brazilian cults are, without doubt, the most cruel of all the attempts to devalue "*culturais negro-africanos*" [Black African cultures] and have still not received the attention of study they deserve (1998:38). Other CEAO scholars, such as Teles dos Santos (1998) and Sansone (1999, 2004) also explore an Afro-Brazilian dialectic between issues of race and Africa as source or origin. Teles dos Santos, in his discussion of the popular Brazilian martial art–dance form *capoeira*, writes that the practice's origins "lie in African dance" and that its ambivalent relationship to larger Brazilian society was due to its historical repression along with other 'African' elements (1998:125). The fact that *capoeira* has now flourished in Brazil in cities like Rio de Janeiro and Salvador and has become increasingly popular abroad, despite a suppressive history of police

brutality and public derision, has been brought about in no small measure by the active engagement and strategic valorisation of the African by Brazilian political culture (Teles dos Santos 1998).

Anthropologist Livio Sansone, in his important 2004 work on Blackness and ethnic identity in Bahia, *Negritude sem Ethnicidade* [*Blackness without Ethnicity*] and elsewhere (1999), attempts to show how elements of the African are used—and sometimes abused—for political, popular cultural and religious purposes. He writes:

Africa is a reference for many black intellectuals and activists as well as for a selected cohort of *Candomblé* houses; the US is the reference for new middle-class blacks as well as for activists who look to the US, mostly for its politics of identity and structured black community; while Jamaica, often verbalised as ‘reggae’ or simply ‘Bob Marley’ reference for a growing group of lower-class youth (Sansone 1999:38)

Sansone’s work explores how Blackness as a commodity flows transregionally, transnationally and translocally. Yet his work also evokes the metaphor of dialectic—one which again places sources of Black authenticity and multiple homelands as important elements of a forever changing model for Black Brazilian identity cast in opposition to an ideology and history of racism and oppression.

Yelvington points out that the metaphor of dialectic has been interwoven into the crevices of the diaspora concept. This is perhaps most clearly stated in the following passage from Elliot Skinner’s *The Dialectic between Diasporas and Homelands*:

Relations between peoples in diasporas and the ancestral homelands are complex and full of dialectical contradictions...Often the dominant groups display contempt for the homelands of their victims...[and]...if a return does occur, there is frequently a conflict between the returnees and the resident population. (1982:11)

Implied by Skinner's idea of diaspora are multiple dialectics that invariably hinge upon some articulation of exclusion, subjugation or oppression—these include 'home' versus 'away', 'foreign' versus 'native' and 'exile' versus 'homeland' (Clifford 1994).

The dialectic perspective has much to offer considering that the life-paths of millions of African slaves and their descendants was, and continues to be for many, an ongoing struggle to counter racism and exclusion. It is hard to conceive, both on an analytical and on a humanistic level, of how one might enter any discussion about Black society in the Americas without an awareness of this history. It is therefore extremely difficult for any anthropological, sociological or historical undertaking to avoid employing this approach. However, what both the diachronic and dialectic approaches can overlook is the importance of *continuing* connections, interactions and dialogues between the worlds of the diaspora and the homeland. Yelvington has termed this perspective *dialogic* and maintains, importantly, that it does not efface in any way the contributions of these earlier research traditions. In recent work, this approach has been used to help scholars of Afro-American anthropology examine connections between artworlds in the African diaspora (Price 2006b), the making of African ethnicities as a product of trans-Atlantic travel (Matory 1999b), religiosity in Jamaica (Pulis 2006),

representations of Blackness in Colombian music (Wade 2006), the recollections of exile among African returnees (Harris 1999; Okediji 1999) and the American resettlement in Liberia (Breitborde 1991).

Yelvington (2006a) traces the use of the dialogue metaphor in anthropology to Tedlock's (1995) introduction of Russian literary critic Mikhail Bakhtin's theories in the mid-1990s. Bakhtin was principally concerned with consciousness and tropes of language in literary works. He asserted that language had both a creative and interpretative aspect but also held that language had the capacity to elicit contestation and struggle over meaning. Any context in which consciousness or worldview is altered or in which a discourse is contested and negotiated is inherently dialogic in that it is interactive and continually producing new meanings.

However, the use of Bakhtin's dialogic metaphor, especially in relation to how it informs our understanding of discourse, can be traced even further back to the work of the *Writing Culture* group (Clifford 1986). It should be noted that their introduction of the dialogic approach is primarily concerned with the production of ethnographic text and the inscription of culture, but Clifford's note that dialogical processes "proliferate in any complexly representative discursive space" is well taken (1986:15). He is referring here primarily to the polyphonic and multivocal collaboration that this group of scholars believes ethnography *must* be, a construct in which different voices demand attention—attention that was denied and restrained in so-called 'traditional' ethnography.

Nonetheless, the dialogic processes that Clifford et al. suggest exist in textual collaborations or textual *products* seems to miss the dialogue that takes place in the actual ethnographic encounter. Chapters 2 and 3 explored the extent to which this encounter has shaped the identity politics of Black American societies, particularly those in which so-called 'Africanisms' persisted. It is in this way that anthropology finds its place within the polyphonic discussion about which so much ink was split during the 1980s. Clifford et al. called for a reassessment of ethnography as text and the place of the ethnographer as author of culture. In *Recapturing Anthropology*, Fox (1991) and others responded that such interpretative exhortations missed the point—that the call for polyphony, reflexivity and dialogue were, to some extent, angst-ridden and overwrought attempts to deal with what Watson (1987) calls the essential reflexivity of the ethnographic endeavour.

More importantly though, what the *Writing Culture* school appears to neglect is that the important dialogue taking place is not one which is inscribed within the pages of an ethnography. The dialogue that ultimately has a far greater impact in *making culture* is the one that occurs when subject communities read and embed the ethnography, as a final product, and the personality of the ethnographer within their own identitarian quests. *Writing Culture* rightfully draws our attention to the politics within text, but does not recognise, as the *Recapturing Anthropology* seminar notes, the politics surrounding the reading and reproduction of text. This reproduction takes place in a cultural milieu in which

anthropology has been part of the process of understanding and creating culture and history – and this has certainly been the case in Black America.

Indeed, it is *history* that the *Writing Culture* group seems to understand least. In chapter 2, I explored the far-ranging impacts of Boas' culture model on issues of race-relations in the Americas. Boas' (1928) humanism and didactic approach to social science girded his assault on racist philosophies. He firmly believed that social progress was intimately connected with advances in scientific knowledge. Although perhaps somewhat naïve, Boas did understand that scientific knowledge had consequences for the populations that he studied and indeed for all of humanity.

This key insight, one that Weber was also keenly aware of, seems to elude Clifford et al. in *Writing Culture*. Weber (1915) understood the creation of knowledge as a social phenomenon that led to the formation of human hierarchies. Science, anthropology included, must be understood within a historical framework, a context that involves understanding ethnography “as a historical phenomenon...associated with social, political, and material circumstances” (Vincent 1991:47). Surely this is the dialogic at its unfiltered best—or worst. A dialogue in which inscribed culture—the ethnography—becomes a note or phrase, sentence or speech, song or, at its very best, concerto, in a continuing, though sometimes lopsided, interaction that makes identities, cultures and histories. Crucial to this dialogue is that ethnography is read not only by scholars and intellectuals, but is also increasingly read by the

people about whom it is written.

In the context of a dialogue between Africa and the Americas, and between locales within the Americas where Blackness finds different expressions, ethnography and ethnographers—sometimes amateur ethnographers—are part of a broad network of ideas and communities, all of which are engaged in defining and manipulating ideas of what it means to be Black and ‘of Africa’ in the modern world. Anthropologists have become part of the call-and-response of identity politics in Black America, not in the least because anthropology—especially American anthropology—has been so intertwined with the nationalist agendas of oppressed and minority populations.

Handler finds this connection unsurprising: “anthropology and nationalism have common origins in Euro-American romanticism [much of which provided grist for Boas’ notion of culture]” and that “social scientific analyses of ethnicity and nationalism were almost always cast in the same terms that ethnic and nationalist movements used to describe themselves. In other words, social scientists and nationalists spoke that same language” (1993:68). Furthermore, informants and the communities from which they arise do more than simply read what is written about them. They are also able to, with great skill and dexterity, manipulate agendas, ideas and data to their own ends.

Clarity, as Fernandez (1986) notes, is vitally important in the selection of a metaphor within which to frame our ethnographic object. The concept or idea

used as a metaphor must bring lucidity and ease of understanding to something that, because of the vicissitudes of history or perhaps the cloudiness wrought by over-study, is unclear or difficult to grasp. We can all, I believe, understand in a very organic and personal way what dialogue means—it is an eminently *human* idea. It cuts to the quick of human interaction, of political discourse and of relationship formation. Anthropology, if it is about anything, is about how human beings form and maintain relationships with other human beings. Surely then, the engagement of ethnographic material by local communities and the drawing in of anthropologists into the web of interaction between, say Africa and the Americas, is as much a part of dialogue as the interactions found in the pages of a text. This, ultimately, is Bakhtin's great contribution. His analysis brought the ordinary and accessible notion of dialogue out of the realm of everyday, person-to-person interaction into the realm of the text which had typically been understood as the monological, and often omniscient, narrative presentation of the author. Bakhtin introduced the idea of heteroglossia—a diversity of voices that Bakhtin believed could be found in text as well as in human interactions and that was, for him, the defining characteristic of the novel as a genre.

Thus, I would like to join those scholars who assert that the metaphor of dialogue has considerable analytical strength in helping us to understand the nature of contemporary interactions between the lands of the diaspora and the 'homeland'. A dialogic approach allows us to explore the multiplex connections that exist between Black societies. It allows us to see the various lands of the

African diaspora not as isolates of Blackness each engaged in representing and reimagining ideas of African origin, but rather as interconnected participants in a conversation about what being Black means and about how the source of this Blackness—Africa—is used. A conversation that includes diverse Black communities throughout the global African diaspora and Africa itself, but also one that includes the work of ethnographers—both past and present—in how Blackness is configured. In this sense, African tradition, whether imagined, remembered, invented or imported, becomes embedded into a context that exists beyond nation and region (Matory 2006:164.)

The use of the dialogue metaphor with respect to the Atlantic world necessarily implies a globalised viewpoint. Currently, scholars of new communications, transport and travel technologies, shifts in patterns of commerce and capitalism and of the global movement of people and commodities all have been extremely successful in reorganising the social sciences around a paradigm of globalisation—and with good reason, for all of these trends have had a tremendous impact upon the world we live. Yet writers continue to perform the perfunctory act of academic genuflection that rehashes and reminds the reader of how interconnected and, consequently, how much smaller the world has become because of changes that have taken place in the last ten, fifteen, twenty or fifty years. However, it is important to remember that this is not a new phenomenon. Furthermore, it is hard to imagine a population that recognises this truth more intimately than the societies of the West African

coast. This African region has been involved in wave after wave of transregional and subsequently, trans-Atlantic interaction, for centuries. Long before the era of European maritime explorations in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries, the Sahelian and coastal areas of West Africa were important participants in far-reaching and extensive networks of trans-Saharan trade with the Berber societies of North Africa.

As European merchants and mariners began to make their way around the Gambia and south towards the Guinea Coast, new loci of transcontinental interaction developed that focused on trade in ivory, gold, ostrich feathers and other resources. Breitborde (1991) has shown that amongst the Kru people, of what is now Liberia, this led to the development of more than just transregional contacts with foreign traders but also brought about the development of cross-cutting translocal ties between different rural communities whose only point of commonality was that they spoke some variant of the Kwa language group. The early involvement of these communities in European exchange led to the establishment of migrant centres at major trading points along the entire West African coast—in these new, locally heterogeneous centres, the Kru ethnic identity was forged (Breitborde 1991:188). These early economic activities laid down partnerships between coastal peoples and European traders that formed the basis for the beginnings of the slave trade—perhaps the most important economic, social and transcontinental relationship for the West African region until the colonial experience.

The slave trade fully drew West Africa into a global network of trade and exchange—an exchange in which the most important commodity was certainly the stolen lives of millions of African slaves but which also set into motion an intercontinental movement of products such as corn, cassava, tobacco, palm oil and the movement of ideas, beliefs, economic forms, political practices and cosmologies. Borrowing both from Ibn Khaldun and Hume, Pierre Verger (2002), the French self-taught ethnographer, photographer and also self-proclaimed *babalaô* (A Yoruba diviner or priest), focused on the movement of people and commerce between Bahia and West Africa, describing this transfer as *flux et reflux* or ‘flow and reflow’. Verger’s work emphasises travel, trade and interaction from the seventeenth through to the 19th century, yet his work only scratches the surface. The ongoing dialogue between the American and African worlds has continued down through the centuries up to the present and has taken on an amazing diversity of forms. On the African side, transatlantic exchange has influenced the following: the political development of numerous African states such as Ghana and Guinea; the music of Nigeria, Ghana, Senegal, South Africa, Angola and the Cape Verde islands; the poetry and writing of Wole Soyinka and Mengistu Lemma; Nkrumah’s and Touré’s Pan-Africanism; and the so-called ‘slave route’ tourism of West Africa.

Another important antecedent to the use of the dialogue metaphor is Paul Gilroy’s seminal 1993 work, *The Black Atlantic*. Here, the sociologically inclined professor of cultural studies explores how different locales in the African diaspora

are linked to each other by patterns of migration and what he refers to as the 'mutual gaze' amongst them. Focusing exclusively on the English-speaking colonies of the Caribbean, the United States and the other former British colonies that received African slaves, Gilroy attempts to understand the processes of cultural reproduction that he sees as part of the history of racism and nationalism in the post-colony. Gilroy tracks developments in this Black Atlantic culture through a historical overview of interactions between English-speaking members of the global African diaspora. Gilroy argues that through travel, musical interchange and cross-pollination, and literary collaboration and trade, these members of the English-speaking Black diaspora influenced each other in a social world excluded from the benefits of democratic ideals and the modernity that created it. As Matory puts it, "for Gilroy, the ships that carry the ideas and cultural artefacts between locales are more emblematic of Black Atlantic culture than are the watery divides that separate one locale from another" (2005:165).

The Black Atlantic represented the first scholarly attempt to look at the African or Black diaspora "without resorting (as it were) to the spectacular paradigms of race or soul, which—Gilroy believes—was the crucial limitation to the visions and conclusions of...Du Bois" (Echeruo 1999:3). Indeed, Gilroy goes out of his way to emphasise that his notion of Blackness differs from Du Bois' dialectic formulation. Instead, Gilroy proposes a category of 'being' that is not based on race, colour, or upon national origin. He posits the idea of belonging to a category that he calls 'The Black Atlantic'. This classification represents a

collective to which all descendants of the African diaspora can belong. Gilroy describes his objective as such: “I want to develop the suggestion that cultural historians could take the Atlantic as one single, complex unit of analysis in their discussions of the modern world and use it to produce an explicitly transnational and intercultural perspective” (1993:15).

Although he seeks to distinguish his work from Du Bois in order to facilitate the genesis of his new “category,” Gilroy (1989; 1993) utilizes and elaborates on Du Bois’ notion of double-consciousness to arrive at a transnational concept of diaspora that explores the migrations and discontinuities that connect the Black cultures of the New World and Britain to one another. Gilroy suggests that Blacks in the United States were not the sole creators of Black American culture, nor of Black Atlantic cultures for that matter. However, he focuses his analysis almost exclusively on the web spun by intellectuals such as those of the Harlem Renaissance and on the English speaking world, and insists, like Appadurai (1990), that transnational exchange undermines national identities. This assertion however, certainly in the context of Pan-Africanism, does not hold up, as much of the discourse about Africa transacted in Gilroy’s ‘Black Atlantic space’ by writers such as Du Bois was quite stridently about nationalism—African nationalism.

Herein lies one of the fatal flaws of Gilroy’s work: he completely avoids discussion of Africa as a real place and African societies as real participants in his model of global interaction. Although the dialogue within the English-speaking

Black world of the former British colonies of the Caribbean, the United States and Britain is the main intellectual thread that binds this work together, it sometimes appears that the dialectic between the oppressed Black world and the White European world is more important to Gilroy than actual interactions within Black Atlantic space. This is most apparent in Gilroy's emphasis that the formation of the Black Atlantic was, more than anything else, a counter response to the systematic history of exclusion from the benefits of the Enlightenment.

Another oversight in his approach is that the individuals he considers the principal negotiators of Black Atlantic culture are educated writers, cultural literati and internationally popular musicians. Yet this privilege granted to elite voices seems less important when we consider Gilroy's most glaring omission—he overlooks that the Black Atlantic world contains communities that speak languages other than English. Indeed, the vast majority of people of African descent transported to other locales by the slave trade speak anything but English: including French, Portuguese, Spanish, different creole and pidgin languages, and, if we include slaves who were returned to Africa, scores of different African languages. This approach constructs Africa and Africans as irrelevant in the quest of those Black societies in the Diaspora to finally realise the promises of the Enlightenment. In this construction Africans are, ironically, non-agents and of little importance to the Black Atlantic as either a real or imagined community. However, Gilroy's work initiated many important contributions to the construction of a new metaphor and interpretive framework

for understanding transregional interaction and dialogue in the African Diaspora and he persuasively demonstrated that Black Americans were not the only originators of global Black culture. Importantly, his title concept—Black Atlantic—has been used and expanded by an ever-increasing array of authors and has become far more than he first envisioned.

Matory (2006), Yelvington (2006) and others seek to broaden—culturally, regionally, linguistically and historically—an understanding of Afro-Atlantic interchange as a live or ongoing dialogue. This approach, they assert, is the best way to consider the heteroglossia of voices throughout the *multiple* African Diasporas and, importantly, from Africa itself. This dialogue includes communities of different linguistic proficiency, nationality, affluence, history, access to transport, and channels of communication—in other words, communities that are not necessary coeval. This dialogue rejects the fiction that Africa necessarily represents the past of Afro-American societies or of any Black community and accepts that American societies have often contributed significantly to the social life of Africa. More than just, as Herskovits asked, ‘what has Africa given America?’, the question must be ‘what has each given the other?’ in an ongoing economic, political, musical, literary, aesthetic and cosmological relationship. In Matory’s words:

The dialogue metaphor...highlights ways in which the mutual gaze between Africans and African Americans, multidirectional travel and migration between two hemispheres, the movement of publications, commerce, and so forth, have shaped African and African American cultures in tandem, over time, and at the same time. It highlights the

ways in which cultural artefacts, images, and practices do not simply 'survive'...they are interpreted and reproduced for diverse contemporary purpose by actors with culturally diverse repertoires, diverse interests, and diverse degrees of power to assert them. (2006:171)

Globalising Blackness or Ongoing Creolisation?

In the ethnographic context of Northeast Brazil, I use the metaphor of dialogue to frame the process of identity making as part of an ongoing process of Globalising Blackness. This process has much in common with the creolisation that took place in the plantation societies of the Caribbean and Latin America. As we have already seen, the *problématique* of Afro-American society, as conceived by anthropologists, has been heavily guided by the debate over the degree of creolisation that took place in the plantations. In the Mintz and Price (1976) model, plantation society was primarily composed of heterogeneous groups of Africans—some over-represented, such as the Yoruba in certain areas, the Akan in other areas and some groups very much underrepresented—who created new Afro-American cultures in the context of the plantation through the use of certain common features of social organisation and worldview as a cultural resource.

The *locus classicus* for this American ethnogenesis can be found in the remarkable creativity and resilience of Maroon societies such as the Saramaka (Price 1996, 2002). I assert here that globalising Blackness, as a concept, draws upon a similar baseline grammar or symbol bank that Mintz and Price (1976) assert served to facilitate coherent Black community formation in and around the plantation, but functions, instead, at a translocal, transregional and dialogic level.

These key symbols are now dominated by a common belief in what counts as 'African' for Black communities—among these are ideas or concepts such as 'ancestor', 'drum', 'earth', 'nature', 'possession', 'return', 'rhythm', 'roots', 'slave', 'spirit', 'trance' and others. Such symbols are then mediated, processed and reinterpreted by a community of Black elites in locales like Salvador and throughout the Afro-American world in an imaginary that seeks to articulate Black identity with reference to the African. It is part of an ongoing process that serves to increasingly bring together, and in some quarters, harmonise, disparate and quite distinct notions of Blackness in different locales of the Americas.

I see the development of globalising Blackness not as a new form of creolisation but certainly as something of a creolising-like process or an extension of creolisation. I make this distinction primarily because the concept of creolisation has, of late, come to encompass far too much theoretical and ethnographic terrain. Hannerz writes:

A macro-anthropology of culture which takes into account the world system and its centre-periphery relation appears to be well served by a creolist point of view. It could even be the most distinctive contribution anthropology can make to world system studies. It identifies diversity itself as a source of cultural vitality; it demands of us that we see complexity and fluidity as an intellectual challenge rather than as something to escape from. It should point us to ways of looking at systems of meaning which do not hide their connections with the facts of power and material life. (1987:556)

Does this mean that anywhere we find mixing, blending, syncretism, fusion, borrowing or otherwise heterogeneous cultural practices we are dealing with a creole culture? And, if indeed this is the case, does this also imply that

complementary or in opposition to these 'creole' cultures exist 'pure' cultures?

What is English society if not a mixture of Roman, Germanic and Celtic

traditions? Dutch? Indian? Ghanaian? Canadian? Japanese?

Hannerz emphasises that, typically, creolisation takes place in locales where a colonial past has led to ethnic diversity within a community and very much relies on world systems and dependency theory. His analysis also focuses very much on an area of the world that is perhaps second only to the Caribbean in terms of regional ethnic diversity and connectivity with the trans-Atlantic movement of large populations: the West African coast. Here, on the periphery, in Hannerz' model, anything can and often does happen in terms of ethnic creativity but the end result is usually some recombination of dominant European linguistic 'traits' with 'traditional' contributions from the native. This model pays little attention to patterns of creolisation in which there is no continuum of dominant to peripheral cultural characteristics, such as those found among the Saramaka and other maroons and, although it emphasises post-coloniality as a precondition for creolisation, he also notes that "in the end, it seems, we are all being creolised" (Hannerz 1987:557). Surely then, If everything is creole, then creole becomes nothing.

The word creole comes from the Latin root *criar* which can mean 'to raise', 'to breed', 'to create', or 'to give birth to'. It can also mean to be of local origin or to be 'born of' a particular place, thus the word *criollo* in Spanish and *crioulo* in Portuguese. During the colonial era throughout Latin America these terms came

to describe people born in the 'New World'. This second usage of the word creole has come to be used as a descriptor of anything presumed 'invented' in the Americas, such as the *criollo* cuisine of the Andean region of South America or the dog breed, *perro criollo*, of Uruguay. The concept of creole as someone of mixed ancestry and a product of *mestizaje* or *mestiçagem*, whether of European, Amerindian or African, first began in the Americas in the early to mid-colonial period. By the early 19th century creole nationalism formed the basis of Simon Bolivar's rallying cry for the liberation of what were the Vice-Royalties of Peru and Rio de la Plata—now much of Spanish South America, including Peru, Chile, Bolivia and Argentina. Creole nationalism was also used to great effect during the Mexican Revolution, and in the early 20th century anthropological–nationalist musings of Freyre and others in Brazil (see Bennett 2003; Freyre 1956, 1959; Lohse 2004).

Creolisation as a social science concept has its roots in linguistics. Most creole languages are based on European ones with substrate elements from African, Oceanic or Amerindian populations, though there continues to be significant debate in linguistics as to the extent of the linguistic contribution of the non-European substrate to the language itself (Chaudenson et al 2001; Mufwene 1998). Amongst both anthropologists and linguists, creolisation was not a commonly used concept until the late 1960s and early 1970s, most notably after contributions in Dell Hymes's volume *Pidginization and Creolization of Languages* (1971). After this, linguists and anthropologists alike started to see

the process of creole language formation as first and foremost a consequence of social phenomena that could not be understood, linguistically speaking, without reference to historical factors (Jourdan 1991; Thomason and Kaufman 1988), such as those found in the plantation. Hyme's argument in his 1971 volume—a work produced after a conference on pidgins and creoles held at the University of the West Indies in 1968—was that creolisation needs to be understood in the context of very particular socio-historical context in which groups of peoples were brought together for the sole purpose of extracting labour from an imported population. Out of this social nexus were born new cultural and linguistic forms that the world had, up to that point, not yet seen.

This model has come to be used by anthropologists to explain and explore ethnographic contexts beyond the Caribbean framework in which it was constructed. The work of Knörr (2008), which builds on the Mintz-Price model, on Hannerz' work, and on linguistic studies attempts some of this conceptual repositioning:

Creolisation is a process in which ethnically diverse people become indigenized...distinct from other forms and processes of cultural mixing because it involves ethnicization and indigenization...It allows for both ethnic *and* transethnic identification within contemporary, ethnically heterogeneous societies. (2008:14)

However, under what circumstances? Postcoloniality? Slavery? Flight from persecution? Refugee status? Urban migration? Knörr is never quite clear about these factors might be and herein lays the danger with this kind of conceptual expansion. I certainly do believe, as Knörr does, that the concept has much to

offer an analysis of social contexts such as those found in the ethnically complex and culturally multi-layered societies of West Africa, but I believe some degree of clarity about what sociohistorical conditions lead specifically to creolisation is necessary and Knörr's analysis does not provide this.

The annals of anthropology are littered with the corpses of many an overused concept and theoretical abstraction, such as the folk-urban continuum, ethnoscience, cultural materialism, syncretism or the organic/homeostasis metaphor. Overused in that through expansion and reorientation towards ever-increasing arrays of situations and contexts the concept comes to lose much of its analytical vigour. I very much share Knörr's call for a deeper understanding of creolisation's hermeneutic potential, but we must be careful again about spreading the concept too thin. Mimi Sheller (2003) has explored exactly this kind of repurposing and redefinition of the creolisation concept in some detail and remarks on the problems with reorienting this concept to other ethnographic terrain in which cultures have become mixed, intertwined or blended:

Creolization...is not simply about moving and mixing elements, but is more precisely about processes of cultural 'regrounding' following experiences of violent uprooting from one's culture of origin. It is deeply embedded in situations of coerced transport, racial terror, and subaltern survival.... Creolization is a process of *contention* (2003:189)

In other words, the conditions found specifically in the slave plantations of the Americas and Caribbean. Sheller concludes, essentially, that the work of theorists such as Hannerz serves to rob Afro-American and Caribbean societies

of the historical agency that the more sociohistorically specific form of the creolisation concept afforded these populations and also diminishes its analytical power. By removing or relocating the unique cultural strategies forged in plantation societies to deal with toil and whip to the level of 'global culture', Sheller cautions that theorists such as Hannerz and others (Clifford 1992, 1994, 1997; Hannerz 1987), whose work sees the whole world as undergoing creolisation, are weakening or making irrelevant the historically specific form of creolisation found in slave communities.

Creolisation versus *Créolité*

An important distinction must be made between creolisation and the discourse of *créolité* found in the writing of Francophone Caribbean writers such as Jean Bernabé, Patrick Chamoiseau and Raphaël Confiant. *Créolité*, though born on the tiny island of Martinique, truly emerged in the smoke-filled salons of Paris. For although it claims to speak of a pan-Caribbean identity and of the history—or lack thereof—of the Antilles, it is very much a French literary trope and primarily speaks to the French islands of the Caribbean. *Créolité* grew out of Aimé Césaire's notions of *négritude*. Published in the 1930s, Césaire's (1971) *Cahier d'un retour au pays natal* introduced powerful and subversive new ideas of what it meant to be Black and Caribbean and added a new voice of Black resistance to those emerging from New York, Haiti and Cuba. *Négritude* revolved around the restoration of a Black cultural identity to all peoples of African descent but it went beyond the race-based assertions of Africanity suggest by Du Bois or

Garvey—it very much posited that in every area of social life, Black society possessed unique psychological, cultural and intellectual ‘traits’. This charge would be continued by one of Césaire’s students in Martinique, Frantz Fanon (1965), writing militant poetry rather than prose, as would Fanon’s contemporary, Édouard Glissant (1969), who remains an important contributor to the literature on postcolonial peoples.

Césaire, Fanon and Glissant would inspire a new generation of Martiniquan authors in the late 1980s to contextualise issues of Blackness and Caribbean identity in an increasingly globalised world as *créolité*. However, although the *créolistes* saw Césaire and Glissant as intellectual “father-figures and “elder brothers” respectively, they criticised *négritude* for privileging a worldwide notion of Africanness and Glissant’s *antillanité* for focusing too much on the adaptation of Old World peoples to a New World setting (Price and Price 1997:8). In 1989, the discourse of *créolité*, which up until that point had only been explored in novels such as Chamoiseau’s (1999) *Chronique de sept misères*, received a more formal and theoretical treatment in the 1989 Bernabé, Chamoiseau and Confiant volume, *Éloge de la créolité*. The *Éloge* is, more than anything, an exaltation of a creole identity that is not defined by Africa, Europe or any other ‘old’ power; it is instead an all-encompassing vision of the many threads of history and culture that have been woven together to create the Antilles. Creole identity, for the writers of the *Éloge*, highlighted the creation of new cultural forms based on interaction, mixing and mutual exchange between the colonised and

enslaved and their masters, and praises those slaves who faced oppression and brutality to forge a new society in the Americas:

What we once believed to be Caribbean history is no more than the History of Colonization of the Caribbean. Beneath the shock waves of French history, beneath the Great Dates marking the arrival and departure of colonial governors, beneath the uncertainties of colonial struggles, beneath the standard white pages of the official Chronicle (where the torches of our revolts appear only as tiny blotches), there was our own obstinate trudging along... The new heroism of those who confronted the hell of slavery, using obscure codes of survival, indecipherable means of resistance, an impenetrable variety of compromises, unexpected syntheses for living. (Bernabé et al 1989:36)

The protagonists of *créolité* proclaim themselves to be of neither European nor African nor Asian descent, but 'creoles', drawing on all of these cultural sources, but ultimately not *of* these places or cultures. They emphasise their own creativity and, unsurprisingly, the place of the Caribbean storyteller or *conteur* in helping to create and disseminate the idea of subversive resistance to the master (Price and Price 1997:9). Meanwhile, the *créolistes* demean maroon societies, such as the *quilombos* of Brazil, as slaves who took the easy way out by abandoning their fellows in the plantations and seeking a new environment in which to live away from the pressures and 'compromises' of creolisation.

The *créoliste* worldview is insular: it asserts that dialogue exists between Black communities, but, like Gilroy's mistake in imagining the Black Atlantic, it limits the confines of these communities—in this case they are restricted exclusively to the Francophone Antilles. The *créolistes* see diversity everywhere within the rarefied atmosphere of the French Caribbean world, which they depict

as full of the kind of cultural interchange to which they have become accustomed in Paris: Africans, Asians, Arabs, Chinese all interacting in a wonderfully creative milieu. Yet this viewpoint fails to see similar diversity in the Spanish or Anglophone islands of the Caribbean and completely neglects to realise that the narrow straits and channels that separate the islands have never proven to be a barrier to cultural and linguistic dialogue between fishermen, traders and other seafarers. They argue that the cultural forms of Martinique are a product of an essentially multicultural and multilingual society in which chaotic and cacophonous processes of admixture created a brand-new society (Bernabé et al 1989). And yet, their work is overwhelmingly oriented towards a European and Francophone perspective—a perspective that revels in the playful and nuanced use of French prose to depict a romantic image of a plantation in which slavery wasn't 'that bad' and where the runaway African slave is depicted as being "spiritually mired in times past, with their loincloths, spears and bows" (Chamoiseau 1998:142). In this dynamic redrawing of the Caribbean past, those who embraced mixture and, most importantly, Frenchness are seen as resistance heroes whereas Césaire's model of *négritude* is seen as backwards, unsophisticated, too African, and all together too Black.

It is to *négritude* and not *créolité* that I think the idea of a dialogic approach to globalising Blackness presented here owes the largest debt. Césaire's perspective attempted to incorporate a global understanding of what it meant to be Black, albeit under the umbrella of a unifying Marxist ideology. He envisioned

a future in which all the peoples of the African diaspora could come together to fight the racist, classist and exclusionary philosophies that had held Black peoples in shackles for too long. Césaire was instrumental in helping the former colonies of Martinique, Guadeloupe and Reunion achieve *département* status within the French republic. Césaire's activism also included an unceasing pro-independence campaign for Guinea in the French National Assembly during which he wrote *Hail to Guinea* as homage to the leadership of Sekou Touré. Césaire's actions for Black independence and his ideas of *négritude* furthered the metaphor of dialogue between the Americas and Africa which I believe is crucial to understanding Black movements throughout the Atlantic world,

I seek then to place the stories to follow in this and in subsequent chapters in the context of an ongoing process of globalising Blackness that builds upon a history of creolisation and dialogue within the wider Black world. A dialogue, though much indebted to Césaire's *négritude*, based not on a need to free colonial peoples or a fight for independence, nor based on an ambiguous and nebulous notion of mixing and syncretism, like *créolité*; but rather a dialogue focussed on the manipulation and usage of Africa as an imagined source of cultural power and authority in the creation of a new kind of instrumental Black identity in Bahia. New, in that its agents and entrepreneurs seek to move away from the perceived fallacies of Brazil's 'racial democracy' and instead seek to engage a model that emphasises the African as the ultimate expression of 'true' Blackness.

Slave Routes and the Usual Suspects: Nigeria and Angola

In a 2005 article in the Brazilian journal *Revista Brasileira De Ciências Sociais*, Patricia de Santana Pinho (2005) called for a decentering of studies about Blackness, away from a United States-biased perspective. In this article Santana Pinho asserts that Salvador in particular should be considered an important nexus, a world city or *cidade mundial*, and a 'Mecca' of negritude. Ironically though, she invokes the name of Herskovits and mentions his sliding scale of Africanisms and Salvador's high ranking in this list, and goes on to rely on the importance of other North American and European scholars like Verger (2005:40-43). Although Santana Pinho's work demands a repositioning of Africanity studies away from a Black American racial perspective, she makes the same oversight that many scholars and identitarian elites commit when orienting their discourse towards Africa—she homogenises, generalises and otherwise neglects the vast diversity of the continent. To be sure, Brazil's historic contact with Africa was limited to certain areas—the West African 'Slave Coast', along with Angola and other Portuguese colonies. But, in Santana Pinho's presentation of Salvador as a new centre for Blackness, distinct from places like Atlanta or Harlem, cast not in the trope of the plantation-based African ethnicity detective story we explored in chapter 3, but, rather, in the contemporary context of a dialogue between Black worlds, she falls back on the usual suspects: Yorubanness, Nigeria with a *soupçon* of Angola and *capoeira* thrown in for good measure.

This pattern finds replication in the work of many scholars and writers on the Africanness of Salvador and of Brazil in general (see Bacelar 2001; Beata de Yemonja 1996; Dantas 1988, 2002; Dzidzienyo 1999; Ojo-Ade 1999; Omidire 2005; Wesolowski 2006) and from a historical perspective, is completely understandable. The societies of the Lagosian lowlands, the Bight of Benin, the Guinea Coast and further south along the Angolan coast contributed the vast majority of individuals to the trans-Atlantic slave trade. Consequently, those cultures have found, through so-called survivals or through processes of creolisation and later on, dialogue and reinvention, dominant expression in Brazil and elsewhere in Latin America and the Caribbean. However, I am not questioning the importance of Yoruba religious traditions, for example, in both the origins and quotidian practices of, for example, the *Candomblé terreiro*. Instead, I am suggesting that when these cultural and historical elements are highlighted—both by cultural elites and scholars—in order to forge contemporary identities that seek to articulate a more global and unified idea of what it means to be a descendant of African peoples often, I would suggest, the opposite is achieved. In Brazil, these practices serve not to unite Black Americans or Brazilians in shared understanding about Africa and Africa's issues. Rather, what I have all too often found is an oversimplified and homogenised picture of Africa in which African culture equals drums, spirits, and *orixás*¹³, and in which everybody can

¹³ *Orixás* are the spiritual entities or deities that are worshiped in Brazilian forms of Yoruba-based African religious practice such as *Candomblé*. These entities are often associated with a natural force such as lightening, the ocean or fire and organised into lines or phalanxes. *Orixá* is the

speak Yoruba.

In this, the Brazilian articulation of an African oriented Blackness is not too different from the one found in the United States in that both seem to emphasise sympathy, understanding and connectedness with Africa but also downplay the importance of actually interacting with real Africans. The difference, however, is that in the United States Yoruba culture is often replaced with the symbols, language and culture of the Asante people of Ghana as key markers of Blackness and Africanness.

For example, the *kente* cloth of the Asante people of Ghana has come to serve as a powerful symbol of Africanness for Black Americans and also as an important 'ethnic' modifier in the repertoire of Black American material culture¹⁴. Those who wear or display *kente* or use Asante names are very much articulating an African oriented expression of Black identity. From Bill Cosby sporting *kente* bowties and cummerbunds on *The Cosby Show*, to Bill Clinton wearing *kente* over his wool suit in the tropical heat of Accra, to the historically Black American colleges use of *kente* in graduation robes, to the proud display of *kente* during Kwanza, and the naming of young children Kofi, Ama or Abena, the Asante have become the principal ethnic reference point for popular expression

Brazilian transliteration of the Yoruba *òrìsà*.

¹⁴ See Ross's volume *Wrapped in Pride: Ghanaian kente and African American Identity* for excellent coverage of this topic (1998)

of Africanity in United States. Yet, as Bruner (1996) and others (Hasty 2002; Lake 1995) have shown in their studies of Black American travel to Ghana, there appears to be a considerable gulf between the popular construction of Asante and Ghana in the American imagination and the expectation of what life in this prosperous, though still developing, West African country is really like. Bruner writes:

What most Ghanaians want from tourism is economic development, including employment, new sources of income, better sanitation and waste disposal, improved roads, and a new harbor. Expectations are high. The regional planning agency wants the tourist dollars to remain in the Central Region for the benefit of the community.... For many African Americans, the castles are sacred ground not to be desecrated. They do not want the castles to be made beautiful or to be whitewashed. They want the original stench to remain in the dungeons...Ghanaians want the castles restored, with good lighting and heating, so they will be attractive to tourists; African Americans want the castles to be as they see them-a cemetery for the slaves who died in the dungeons' inhuman conditions while waiting for the ships to transport them to the Americas. Ghanaians see the castles as festive places; African Americans as somber places. (1996:291-293)

In interviews I conducted both at Elmina castle and Cape Coast castle informants echoed a similar sentiment. In addition, I was also interested in how visitors to the forts saw their surroundings and the local Fante communities surrounding the forts. One man named Michael, a veteran traveller to Ghana from the United States who had visited the coastal forts many times and who was wearing, at the time of our discussions, a *kente* baseball cap and a t-shirt with the words RETIRED SLAVE printed in bold letters, offered some very interesting thoughts:

Ghanaians are generally real nice people but you know, like all Africans, they don't seem to get it. I've been all over, Ghana, Kenya, South Africa and Africans are the same. They don't understand that the truly evil things done to Blacks in this world were done in America! Now, I'm talking evil...I grew up in the South, in Texas, the life of a Black man when I was a boy was pure hell. No African man can understand it. You see these kids here, they've always got a smile on their faces, always going to the Germans and Dutch and you English [he means me] and asking to be tour guides or to carry bags. All they do to us is call out 'roots!, roots!', they don't even have the sense to know that we're brothers. Especially these Ghanaians around here. This is where most slaves came from you know, that's history! That boy there [referring to a younger tour guide of 32 years], he could be my cousin, a thousand removed. But really they should let the US State Department run this place as a holy place for African-Americans— But every time I come here they've put a new coat of whitewash on, put new signs in Dutch, Japanese, Portuguese, Chinese, goddamn Mongolian, what else. This is a place for Americans. Who cares about goddamn Japanese tourists? This is a Black heritage site!¹⁵

I told Michael that former Dutch colonies like Suriname also imported large number of African slaves, many of them right from this castle and that maybe, one day, they would like to visit this place also. His response, not fit to print here, can be reduced essentially to some version of 'well they don't pay the bills do they?' I also asked Michael about why, if he has such a poor opinion of Ghana's ability to handle these sites and to preserve the terrible history of slavery, he kept coming back and why he wore the *kente* cap. *Kente* is 'African' he tells me, it represents a powerful African civilisation—the Asante—who were once as powerful as the Romans and who had contact with ancient Egypt and he also explains that Ghana is easy to move around in. Michael understands that the

¹⁵ Interview with Michael W, Cape Coast, Ghana, March, 2003

United States has had an ongoing historical interaction with Ghana. He notes: “Nkrumah learnt democracy from the US, that’s why this place is stable—not like all those other African countries. I won’t step foot in one of these French countries in Africa. I went to Benin once. Oh man, they can’t do anything straight!”

Now, Michael is a bit of a caricature of a Black American tourist on one of the many so-called ‘roots’ packages that can be purchased for a 21-day whirlwind tour of slave history in West Africa. He’s old, blustery and not shy with his opinions. But his sentiments are not exactly unique among travellers seeking to engage with a quintessentially African experience oriented towards the Diaspora. The itinerary of most tourists participating in these trips is one in which interaction with local Ghanaians is limited and time spent away from other Americans is minimized as much as possible. This is, of course, nothing special and is the nature of all pre-packaged holidays that seek to add a dash of culture to the mix—whether they are to the Taj Mahal, Machu Pichu, Chichen Itza or Blarney Castle. Further, as an anthropologist, one must always guard against the kind of condescension and elitism with respect to tourism that all too often leads practitioners of the discipline down the road of being little more than cultural connoisseurs and impresarios of authenticity. The issue is that these travellers generally appear to be motivated by something far more deep-rooted than just finding out ‘where they are from’. That is, the search for some kind of expression of Black identity that moves beyond the racial antagonisms of their home country

and is 'rooted' in an orientation towards Africa. Michael's brash remarks notwithstanding, there is often a real outpouring of emotion when Black American visitors enter the forts, explore the dungeons and ceremonially re-enter the loading door of the forts from the seaward side—the so-called 'door of no return'. Visitors talk of the pride and strength they receive from these places, these Black 'places of power,' where their ancestors suffered so much sadness and brutality. A woman who was born and raised in New York, christened Joan, but who had taken the Asante name Ama later in life told me:

This is our true homeland. This is where my heart comes from, where a Black woman can be Black and proud and not have to worry about white American society. This is an African country and we are Africans—not African-Americans or Blacks or Negroes, whatever people at home call us, we are displaced Africans. Refugees displaced by time. People in Ghana don't understand that because their experience with the British was more positive than ours in America. Ghanaians don't know true racism, because, as Appiah says, they were still the majority in their own country. Maybe outsiders ruled them for a time, but they were still Blacks in a Black land. We've always been Blacks in a White land. That's why this place is so important to us.¹⁶

Ama here is citing Kwame Anthony Appiah (1992), the Ghanaian philosopher, from his landmark *In My Father's House*. Appiah (1992:6) writes that many Black Americans, because they have been raised in an effectively segregated society and have grown up with discrimination, have a different relationship with white people than Africans who, although once ruled by European societies, still lived their lives according to and controlled by the

¹⁶ Interview with Ama N, Elmina, Ghana, March 2003

institutions of African society. It is an irony though that Ama would choose to invoke Appiah in her romantic allusions to a Black paradise in that one of Appiah's explicit goals with this volume was to reject the idea of a romantic African 'essence' that permeated the continent—asserting instead, that there are no shared cultural inclinations or histories that serve to bind all Africans together.

Many Ghanaians are at a loss as to how to communicate with these emotion-filled individuals: "Why do they get so worked up?" one local tour guide asked me, "It's not like they know anybody here and they don't even want to talk to us, to us Ghanaians. 'You can't understand' is what one American told me. Fah!" To this, I responded to my disgruntled friend that in the Black American experience, especially in literature, return to Africa has taken on something of a mythic quality, almost like a Garden of Eden. In the prose of writers like Maya Angelou, Alice Walker and Richard Wright, the paramount chiefs of Ghana, such as the gold-clad *Asantehene*, are like the kings and queens of an ancient time when Black pride and Black power held court. For them, Africa is motherland and—especially for individuals like W.E.B. Du Bois, St. Clair Drake and Maya Angelou, all of whom took up residence in Accra—Ghana is that motherland in all its finery. "There's a long history of US and Ghanaian interaction. Starting with Pan-Africanism and Nkrumah through to today. They feel connected to Ghana," I responded to the tour guide. "But not to Ghanaians!" he harshly retorted.

This story illustrates a number of important aspects of Black Atlantic dialogue. It demonstrates that many of these so-called 'roots' tourists or Black

travellers actively consume scholarship that seeks to articulate new definitions of Blackness and Black identity. It also shows, quite glaringly, that the dialogue between disparate areas of Blackness, in this case, the United States and the Ghanaian coast, is sometimes less than harmonious and often quite discordant. Indeed, in Bakhtin's dialogic model for understanding discourse, there is no emphasis or prerequisite for harmony or accord between participants engaged in dialogue. Bakhtin (1981) emphasises that dialogue is often dissonant and cacophonous as voices interact and seek to establish or contest meaning. Finally, although the two parties engaged in this dialogue sometimes disagree on the how symbols such as *kente* or slavery should be used and interpreted—they are decidedly contested symbols—both sides use these symbols to articulate, at a rudimentary level, a generic and homogenised image of Africa. Although my friend, the tour guide, frequently complains bitterly about the attitude of many travellers, he employs and refers to the legacy of slavery or the importance of something like *kente* to the Asante in much the same way as the tourists that pay him. He certainly has very different feelings and beliefs about these symbols—for him, the history of slavery is not an important part of his identity but it is a part of his daily life as a tour guide. In his work as representative of the slave castles and of the Ghanaian government's tourism board, he uses and negotiates the key symbol of slavery in an ongoing dialogue with Black Americans about what it means to be Black and so contributes to a globalised idea of Africanised Blackness.

Globalising Blackness then, is about an African oriented expression of Black identity, but also one that emphasises a very American (and I use the word here in its broadest sense) idea of what Africa is about. American, in that it conforms to the kind of perceptions and interests that have stimulated trans-Atlantic dialogues over the past one hundred-and-fifty years: one that generalizes and essentialises about African ethnic identities; that imposes notions of purity and unity on African ethnic groups that—in the context in which they are found—hold no such beliefs about themselves; that creates idealised African types, whether they be Yoruba in Brazil or Asante in the United States; and that seeks to impose these identity constructions on all perceived constituents. This is, in other words, what Sansone (2004) calls ‘Blackness without ethnicity’ in that, it seeks to build on a formulation of identity that uses the symbols and practice of a particular African culture, but wants little or nothing to do with the in-situ realities of life in that society. Africa here becomes a place without states, without polities, without, in some expressions, history, and, in the words of our tourist friend Michael, a place where Black people have lived without the pressures of life in plantation and all that it begat: without war, without oppression and without sadness. In this sense, Globalising Blackness is a considerable departure from the work of Du Bois or Césaire. For, although both did their share of generalising about what Africa could mean to communities of Black people throughout Diaspora, both were equally aware of and engaged with the regional nuances of African life. Du Bois understood the different histories of countries like Guinea, Mali, Ghana,

Nigeria and the differing impacts that French and British colonialism had wrought on these fledgling nations. Césaire too was intimately familiar with locally specific manifestations of French rule in different parts of Africa. Neither could be accused of homogenising the diversity of the African continent.

Rather, the globalising of Blackness that I assert is currently occurring in places like the United States and in, as we shall see, Brazil, draws programmatically, but not intellectually, from Du Bois and Césaire. Further, in its attempts to re-situate the boundaries of Blackness towards the inclusion of a generalised notion of Africa that builds on key symbols of Blackness negotiated through trans-Atlantic and transregional Black dialogue, this process is, I believe, something of a continuation of creolisation. Creolisation began in the Maroon communities of Jamaica and Suriname, in the *quilombos* of Brazil, in the plantation societies of Bahia, Cuba and Louisiana, in the Gullah low country of South Carolina and indeed wherever diverse communities of Africans with different languages and different cultures found themselves living cheek-by-jowl with each other. Similarly, the globalisation of African-oriented Blackness builds upon the global proximity of diverse Black communities who have come to share a similar set of basic ideas about what it means to be descended from Africa and to be Black.

Chapter 5: West African Cultural Brokers in Northeast Brazil

In the previous chapter I explored how the metaphor of dialogue, both between the ethnographer and those whom they study and between different regions in the Americas and Africa, can better inform an understanding of how Black communities in countries such as Brazil and the United States seek to redefine Blackness in light of Africa. This discussion took us to one of the key nexus points in trans-Atlantic dialogue—the city of Cape Coast in Western Ghana where, each year, thousands of travellers in the Black Atlantic seek to uncover a long-lost connection to an African past. I now turn to another important nexus point in this dialogue and the principal ethnographic focal point of this study—the city of Salvador, Bahia, Brazil.

Just as Cape Coast was once a major point of embarkation for thousands upon thousands of Africans, captured and shackled, leaving for the plantations of the Americas, it was also the starting point for the life of another man from the West African coast who today labours—albeit freely—under a Brazilian sun. In the introduction to the present work we met Georgia from Cape Coast. He is part of a small but growing community of West Africans living in Salvador that are actively involved in aspects of ‘roots’ tourism, in the importation of West African handicrafts, in serving as experts on Africa, African religion and West African

cultural traditions, and most importantly, in engaging in a dialogue with the African-descended peoples of Brazil on what it means to be Black.

These individuals are contemporary representatives of a transnational community that extends back through time and that travels back and forth across the Atlantic between cities like Salvador and Lagos, New York and Accra, Havana and Cape Coast. They are a community rooted in the transregional space of the Atlantic world. A community that includes writers like W.E.B. Du Bois, Richard Wright and Maya Angelou; politicians like Nkrumah and Touré; and musicians like Paul Robeson, Fela Kuti and Gilberto Gil. However, the community also includes less illustrious, though in the local cultural sense no less influential, members such as the following: our street-hustler friend Georgia, teachers of the Yoruba language at the Universidade Federal da Bahia, and representatives and visiting leaders of other Yoruba-inspired African traditions from Cuba, the United States, Canada and, of course, Nigeria. These Black men and women actively engage in negotiating ideas of Black identity articulated through some connection—real or asserted—with the African continent. I assert that these individuals, like Anderson's "pioneers" (2006:47-65), are involved in continuing a trans-Atlantic dialogue, furthering the ongoing process of imagining and creating communities of Blackness, and in interjecting the idea of Africa into Brazil's racial discourse.

In the dialogue between the Americas and Africa, it often seems to be the American voice and the American meaning that carries the most weight. To make

this point, I'd like to reintroduce Georgia and some of his West African comrades who live, work and study in Salvador.

Georgia's Story

"Wo hö te sɛn?" — A common Akan greeting of the language spoken by the Asante and Fanti people of Ghana, were the first words I said to Georgia when I met him in the old neighbourhood of Bomfim in Salvador in 2005. "Oh!" he said, "Indiaman speaking Twi!? How did you learn to speak it?" I had heard about Georgia from a group of Brazilian friends that I had met at a concert celebrating the work of Nigerian Afro-beat pioneer, Fela Kuti. I had related to these individuals that I had spent extended periods of time in Ghana, to which they responded that I should meet Georgia. I was quite surprised to learn that there were Ghanaians in Salvador. I had expected from previous experiences in Ouidah and Lagos to find Yoruba speakers from Nigeria in Brazil but I had not counted on finding a man from the Ghanaian coastal city of Cape Coast. This city once held a small community of "Afro-Latin" (Amos and Ayesu 2002) slave returnees from Brazil, but it is no longer really part of the Afro-Brazilian imaginary landscape.

Cape Coast, founded in the 15th century by the Portuguese, is now perhaps one of the most important, if not *the* most important, stop on West African 'roots' tourist packages that transport groups of travellers, primarily Black Americans, on pilgrimages through the major West African ports where slave-ships, laden with

human cargo, departed for the Americas. The other important sites for these slave routes include Gorée in Senegal and Ouidah in Benin. However, Ghanaian locales find little coverage in Brazilian depictions of Africa and so to find a Cape Coaster, as they are called, transplanted to this new and increasingly important American nexus for 'slave' and 'roots' oriented travel—Salvador—was a welcome surprise.

I kept hearing about Georgia and kept being referred to this charismatic jack-of-all-trades: at public lectures organised by the Centro de Estudos Afro-Orientais (CEAO); at community groups; in the tourist-oriented old city of Salvador—Pelourinho; in a particular 'roots-reggae' bar that he frequented; and in a *terreiro* which regularly received groups of Black American tourists. However, it was not until about two months after first hearing his name that I finally got the chance to meet Georgia. I had been invited to a friend's birthday party and had agreed to cook for them a typical Indian dinner of chicken curry and rice. Fieldwork, at times, can be an extremely lonely process and so before heading down to Brazil I had brought with me several large bags of Indian spices so that I could, on occasion, retreat to my small apartment to make a home-cooked meal and indulge in its familiar flavours. My friends had discovered my spice stash and had cajoled me into cooking a whole brace of chickens and several large pots of rice for their celebration. "Plus," they told me, "Georgia will be there and so you can finally meet him." Little did I realise that I would be spending that entire day cramped with Georgia into a tiny, sweaty and ill-equipped kitchen, stirring pots

and vying for stove space. Georgia had served first as a kitchen boy and then later as a cook on a large carrier ship registered out of Lagos and in this capacity he had learnt well how to prepare a feast of fufu [pounded yam and cassava], jolof [a spicy fried rice] and guinea-fowl—all West African staples. Apparently Georgia had also been convinced into cooking by our persuasive mutual friends in order to prepare what may have been the first Indo-West African fusion meal ever served in Northeast Brazil.

I soon discovered that Georgia left his home in Cape Coast in his early teens and has not been home since. He is 28 years old and has lived in Nigeria, Malaysia, the Philippines, Mexico and Brazil. He still has fond memories of Cape Coast and we spent much of our first day reminiscing about that most hospitable of Ghanaian cities—its geography, the colourful *asafo* sodality shrines, the twin forts of Cape Coast castle and Elmina, and its famous landmarks like the Savoy hotel that, though not as distinguished as its London namesake, still serves as a jumping nightspot for highlife music and fresh palm-wine on a Saturday evening. Since Georgia left home, “to make money,” he tells me, he has spent most of his time with and around Nigerians. “I love Ghana. Ghana is my home and my brother is still there, along with many of my sisters and my mother is still alive,” Georgia says, “but you know, people in Ghana have a bad idea of Nigerians. They think Nigerians are too wicked and too fast. But you know, Nigerians are the best at making business. Nobody can beat Nigerians in business. Ghana can learn so much from Nigeria.”

These comments are ones that I am familiar with. Throughout much of West Africa and indeed much of sub-Saharan Africa, Nigeria is seen as an economic powerhouse. Nigerians are often essentialised as quick-witted and sharp entrepreneurs wherever they ply their trade; from Senegal to Kenya, from Sudan to South Africa, Nigerians have developed a local reputation throughout the continent as businessmen.

“Isn’t this because Nigeria has so much oil?” I ask Georgia, “and because they are so rich in oil they are able to travel and work business?” I add. “No” Georgia responds and continues:

Nigerians, especially Yoruba and Igbo have a nose for business. Most of the Africans here in Brazil are Nigerians. There are maybe a hundred Nigerians living here in Salvador and they all are involved with either the tourist business or with selling handicrafts and many of them are even sanctioned by the Nigerian government! Ha! You think Ghana would pay for me to be here! But Nigerians they come and some of them, the government support them, oh!¹⁷

This was true. I had discovered earlier in 2005 that the University of Ile-Ife, now known as Obafemi Awolowo University, has for some time maintained an exchange and collaboration program with the Universidade Federal da Bahia. This program includes a boarding house in the Salvador neighbourhood of Nazaré, brightly painted in the green and white of the Nigerian flag, where Nigerian students are housed. It also features the semi-regular secondment of a

¹⁷ Interview with Georgia, Salvador, Bahia, Brazil, April 2005.

Nigerian scholar to UFBa and CEAO group to teach Yoruba courses, both as part of the university's regular curriculum and as part of CEAO's outreach program to the broader community. Though most of these students receive a small stipend from the Nigerian government and their room and board is covered in the boarding house, these provisions do not cover much beyond the bare necessities. Consequently, many of these students also sell their services as Yoruba tutors to enthusiastic devotees from different *terreiros* who are eager to learn an African language. On the subject of moonlighting as a Yoruba instructor, Georgia has much to tell me:

I speak Yoruba too. I lived in Lagos for a long time. I even lived in what they called 'Brazilian section'. But I never saw no Brazilian come down there! Ha! But my trouble is I can't really write it...plus, I speak like a Lagos man and so it is *mostly* Yoruba, but in Lagos, we have people from everywhere...from Dakar, from Freetown, from Abidjan, from Cape Coast, from Conakry too, from Accra, from Lomé, from Cotonou, from Harcourt [he means Port Harcourt on the Nigerian coast—an important petroleum town], and even coming from Angola and Congo. So when you talk Lagos talk, oh, you don't know what you're saying. It can be a little bit of Twi, some Ewe, from Igbo plus a lot of English. I suppose maybe you will say it isn't Yoruba. So I can't really teach people Yoruba, like these Nigerians, so that is one thing they have. But you know that's it. Me as a Ghanaian here in Brazil, I'm an African businessman, but I really don't get respect as an African. So many of these Brazilians, especially these ones that go to the *Candomblé*, all they want to know is Yoruba. I get tired sometimes. Maybe they haven't heard of Kwame Nkrumah and Ghana as the first independent African country. Someone else came here, some person, she was a French women, I have her card here [he rummages through his wallet for a torn and folded business card] look it says 'Ethnologue', is that like you, [I nod and say yes] she came here and could only speak English and French and no Portuguese and wanted to know from me anything about the *terreiro*. It's always about these *Candomblés*. As for me, I'm a Christian—you know Cape Coast is big for the Church of England, so that's what my parents made me.

But all they want to know is Yoruba and *Candomblé*. Some of these Nigerians who teach Yoruba pretend to be fetish priests, and they go to some small *Candomblé* and say some crazy talk. These Brazilians people believe it because they want to know about Africa, but not about all of Africa, about Nigeria. I would teach them Fanti if they wanted it, but these types don't even know where Cape Coast is!

Georgia appears to be of two minds about his place as an African in Salvador. He seems to be upset about the fact that few of the Brazilians whom he knows are aware of Ghana, of his own ethnic group, the Fanti, or of other places in Africa. However, at the same time, he is always perfectly willing to concoct any manner of wild tale for the entertainment of a crowd hungry for stories of Black Africa, as I soon discovered later in the evening of our first meeting—after the final helpings of Indian curry and Ghanaian yam fufu had been served.

Georgia's hometown of Cape Coast is about one-hundred-and-forty kilometres from the small coastal town of Winneba. The Winneba economy is based on fishing and on tourism surrounding the annual deer hunting festival, or *Aboakyer*, of the local Akan-speaking ethnic group, the Effutu. The festival is a celebration to mark the arrival of the Effutu people in Winneba or Simpa as it is locally called. The story surrounding the event is that upon arrival in Simpa the Effutu's chief deity, Otu, demanded that the family of the chief sacrifice one of its sons each year as thanks for bringing them to this sacred land. In response the people cried that they could never kill one of their princes and so they demanded that a wild cat be substituted for the human being. However, after the first hunt,

the cat killed so many people in their attempts to capture it that a second appeal was made to Otu—that a deer be killed in place of the cat. Otu accepted and to this day the Effutu people ritually capture and slaughter a mature bushbuck in honour of their god and as thanks for continued prosperity. This event has become a major tourist attraction in Ghana in early May, drawing people from all over the country and from the ‘roots’ tourist groups who may be visiting Ghana at the time. Indeed, many ‘roots’ or ‘cultural heritage’ tours include the Winneba festival as an example of ‘wild’ and ‘untamed’ [careful not to use the word savage]¹⁸ Africa. I have attended the festival a number of times and have conducted interviews with ‘roots’ tourists visiting the event, and I know it well.

Georgia, however, has his own take on the story that he regularly tells to groups of tourists at *terreiros* and to his small entourage of young people eager to know something about Africa. On the evening after our big dinner he got himself into position to begin the tale. He tells the story in a half-English/half-Portuguese patois for the benefit of the one individual in the group who can’t speak good Portuguese, but who has come from the U.S. to be initiated at a local *terreiro*. It’s an eclectic group—some of them are from more affluent backgrounds with college educations, while others are part of Georgia’s Brazilian crew who help him scour bars and restaurants for clients and still others are neighbours of my friend who live and fish in the area of the bay around Bomfim and who are

¹⁸ The best examples of this kind of package trip are those offered by the large independent US-based tour company, Avocet Travel, <http://www.avocettravel.com/index.shtml> (2008)

members of a small *terreiro* in the neighbourhood. Georgia begins:

One of the reasons I came to Brazil is because in Africa there is too much of blood. All the time when I was a boy, I had to see sacrifice. You hear about chickens and goats and even here, in some *Candomblés* they will take a fowl and kill it for the gods, for these *orixás*. But this is nothing. In Africa, we do it much more. Like where I used to live in Ghana, there is a place Winneba where they make a sacrifice every year—just like you make a sacrifice to Ogun or Xangô, these people in Winneba, they make a sacrifice. The Winneba people are Fanti like me—they are like the Asante and also there are many Ewe people there in Winneba, they come for the fish. You know, the Ewe have some small connection with your Jeje *terreiros*. [This is true. Some *terreiros* in Salvador, although their practice is essentially Yoruba-based, assert origin from Jeje or Fon traditions from the Benin coast. The Fon are part of a coastal ethnic complex that includes the Ewe people who reside as far west as the Volta region of Ghana]. But you know, really they are all the same peoples in Ghana, we get along, we don't make war like other countries, like Yoruba's, we're peace loving. So you have all these groups living there in Winneba, but every year they have to make a sacrifice of a deer.... But you know, here in Winneba they used to kill humans as the sacrifice. They had to kill the prince of the royal family to make the god happy and for a long time they killed young boys like me, because they were going to be chiefs. As for me, you know my father was a chief, and so you can call me some kind of prince. That means in the old days I could be killed. Even when I was a small boy, I remember my cousin that they wanted to kill. But then it changed. When Nkrumah came in, they stopped the human sacrifice and changed it to a tiger hunt. The area around Cape Coast was once full of tigers, but now they have all been killed. So they changed it to a deer. That is better, but I know that there are still people who wish it was a human. They say that their *orixá* Otu is never pleased with a deer and that is why the fishing is getting worse, and so some people, in back rooms and in the villages around Winneba, away from the tourists, they still sacrifice human beings. That's why I left—I thought I would be next. Too much blood, too much blood!

The Ghana tourism board markets the story in a different way, certainly with less blood, but they emphasize many of the same motifs and symbols to appeal to the large number of 'roots' tourists who must pass through Winneba on their

way from Accra to Cape Coast. The event is not marketed towards Ghanaians but primarily towards those Black travellers looking for an authentically African experience—one that articulates notes and elements of a broadly configured notion of African Blackness. The Effutu claim that the Aboakyer is a seasonal ceremony that is intended to increase the productivity of their fields or the bounty of their nets. However, the event has become a highlight of the tourist calendar in Ghana and many in Winneba orient their entire life around preparing for the inevitable glut of tourists that invade the town each May. In the way it is presented to Black travellers, elemental manifestations of African Blackness are accentuated. Wild animals are prominent in the imagery and although the prey is a harmless antelope species, all of the men featured in tourist literature and in descriptions of the event are typically clothed in leopard or other wildcat skins. As well, drumming, African spirituality and sacrifice are placed front and centre in the tourist materials and Ghana is presented to the eager and enthusiastic travellers as a place where African rituals still survive.

When Georgia tells his version of the story he is able to cast quite a spell. I watch as members of the audience sit on stools and on the stone rear wall of the small apartment's balcony, anxiously hanging on every word—he's good. The questions that are fired at him afterwards include "Oh, so the Fanti have *orixás* also, like the Yoruba?" or "Is this still done today?" or "Do the Yoruba have human sacrifice?" Now, It is not that these individuals are uncritical, uninformed or gullible 'pigeons to be plucked' [a phrase that Georgia often uses], so to

● speak. Many of them have been educated about aspects of African life through information they may have received in the *terreiro* or through events organised by Afro-Brazilian community groups, but their thirst for any information about Africa sometimes outweighs good sense. Moreover, two aspects of Brazilian popular awareness about Africa colour their perspective: one is the Yoruba oriented Afrocentrism of the *terreiro*, which will be explored in greater detail in a subsequent chapter; the other is the kind of media coverage that Africa receives in Brazil.

Most Brazilian media outlets are based either in São Paulo or in Rio de Janeiro. In these two giant cities, the tropical and African elements of Brazil's Northeast is regularly played up and emphasised as an important part of Brazil's history. This finds expression in television programs like *Nigéria, Terra Mãe da África* [Nigeria, The Motherland of Africa] a documentary series aired repeatedly on the country's largest and richest network, TV Globo, from 2005 through 2008. Hosted by one of Globo's few Black women hosts, Glória Maria, the series, aired between segments about new musical acts and political corruption on a 180-minute Sunday night variety show called *Fantástico*, follows Maria throughout Nigeria. The first episode takes us to the old slave market of Badagry, where, according to the host, "*muitos brasileiros podem encontrar suas origens*" [many Brazilians can find their origins]. Badagry, Maria tells us, "*era o porto principal de saída pelos escravos para os Estados Unidos e o Brasil*" [was the principal port of departure for slaves to the United States and Brazil]. Subsequent episodes

examined scenes of Nigeria including: the terrible lives of Nigerian women who have children outside of marriage; recently discovered Nigerian ‘mountain tribes’ who live in isolation and celebrate death as a “*festival da alegria*” [festival of happiness]; and finally, a retrospective episode on Nigeria as a country that few people in the world know or are familiar with—Nigeria as an unknown and mysterious land with hidden tribes and strange rituals.¹⁹

Throughout the series, Yoruba religious practices such as the worship of the familiar *orixás*, the history of slavery, and connectedness with Brazil and especially with Salvador are presented in a kind of hodgepodge grab bag of ideas and images all of which are reduced to ‘Nigerian culture’ or, more frequently, ‘African culture’. In addition, video footage of the numerous festivals and religious ‘rituals’ is usually brimming with images of young, scantily clad—sometimes naked—Black African women, emphasising the exotic and overtly sexual aspect of Nigeria/Africa.

In a more recent incident, on an episode of the very popular *Programa do Jô*, a nightly chat and variety show aired on TV Globo, television host Jô Soares interviewed a Portuguese adventurer visiting Brazil to promote his new book, a supposed ‘ethnographic’ account of Angolan women. However, instead of an academically charged interaction, the ensuing on-air discussion about the book

¹⁹ Brazil's TV Globo still maintains a website for this special where video clips and transcriptions can be found, <http://fantastico.globo.com/Jornalismo/Fantastico/0,,4439,00.html> (2008b)

was filled with ribald and comedic commentary about Africa, savage behaviours, African women's genitalia, African 'rituals' and racist and sexist comments about Africans and Black people in general. Surprisingly, the titillating travelogue was treated in the interview as if it were an important contribution to ethnographic knowledge and a way for Brazilians to understand their connection with Africa. Angolans, again one of the few African nations that Brazilians are familiar with, become a generalised model for all Africans and their 'rituals' become a pattern for how all African religions are practiced.²⁰

The media moguls behind TV Globo have long seen themselves as public guardians of Brazilian culture and regularly produce documentary specials and public service programs that allege to explore Brazil's unique history and culture. Crucial in this programming line-up are *telenovelas*—soap operas. These serialised dramas are extremely popular throughout Brazil and it is not uncommon to find a slowdown in activity on the streets, in bars and restaurants, and in other evening places of work during the hours that these programs are aired. Typically, *telenovelas* interweave multiple storylines of love, romance and betrayal, but also speak to 'working class aspirations' of 'making it' in the big city while maintaining 'Brazilian values.' The *telenovelas* also reflect ideas about Brazil's racial composition in a way that perpetuates the sentiments of 'racial

²⁰ A video clip of this episode of Programa do Jô can be found here: <http://video.globo.com/Videos/Player/Entretenimento/0,,GIM690726-7822-RUY+MORAIS+E+CASTRO+E+JO+COMENTAM+VIDA+SEXUAL+DE+PARTE+DAS+MULHERES+A%20NGOLANAS.00.html#enviarParaUmAmigo> (2008a)

democracy', and the central importance of the Catholic Church in this ideal of Brazilian life. Their reverence for the importance of the Catholic Church in Brazilian life was evidenced during the non-stop media coverage of the recent election of the new Pope, Benedict XVI. It was also very much on display in Globo's media war during the 1990s against the growing evangelical church, Igreja Universal do Reino de Deus [The Universal Church of the Kingdom of God], their leader Edir Macedo, and the Church's media arm, TV Record. Essentially, this battle was not so much about ideology or commercial success but about issues of "cultural hegemony" and who got to speak for what counts as Brazilian (see Birman and Lehmann 1999).

Throughout Globo's history as a major national broadcaster they have sought to steer definitions of Brazilian identity. From productions like the 1976 *telenovela*, *A Escrava Isaura*²¹, based on an 1875 novel by Bernardo Guimarães about a slave-girl named Isaura and the life of Africans—all of whom speak a smattering of Yoruba—on plantations, to more contemporary productions like *Decadência*, a popular *telenovela* that 'unmasked' the corruption found in a fictional evangelical megachurch, Brazil's TV Globo repeatedly casts itself as an arbiter of Brazilian culture and 'Brazilianess'.

However, although Globo and their programs like *Fantástico* and *Programa*

²¹ In 2004, TV Record, fighting back against Globo's domination of the *telenovela* format, produced a remake of *A Escrava Isaura* that did extremely well in the ratings.

do Jô are broadcast nationwide, from Amazonas to Bahia, from the poor middle states like Espírito Santo to the agricultural South, they are very much oriented to the fishbowl of the industrialised Southeast—Rio and São Paulo. In this part of the country, comments like those aired on Soares' show are commonplace and tolerated. Consequently, there was no public outrage or anger expressed at these remarks in newspapers or online. In Bahia, members of local *Afro-descendente* and *Movimento Negro* groups whom I corresponded with after the event said that, although they knew about the episode, they commented that "it wasn't such a big deal" and one even told me that the book discussed on Soares' show wasn't "that bad"²². Considering the recent public castigation of radio and television host Don Imus in the United States after he made several comments on-air about the Black members of the Rutgers University women's college basketball team, this non-action in Brazil seems notable. Imus' comments, though offensive and objectionable, were mild compared with those bandied around on *Programa do Jô*, yet no formal reaction occurred in the wake of this event from any quarter of Brazilian society.

This event did not take place in a media forum reserved for the rich, elite or well connected. Most Brazilian families own a small television set. The evening meal, like in many other societies, is often enjoyed around the TV and one cannot follow the fortunes of the Brazilian national football team without one.

²² Email correspondence with a former teacher from a community group in Salvador. 14/9/2007.

Further, Soares' comments were aired just after 'prime-time', while Imus' remarks were confined to cable TV and radio networks. Why the difference? Firstly, although there is a considerable amount of 'formal' and public obeisance paid to Brazil's 'racial democracy', racism is commonplace in the workplace, in the media and in society at large. Secondly, because of, rather than in spite of, the work of groups like *movimento Negro*, the *terreiros*, popular music, art and tourism, Brazilians are familiar with and used to generalised images of Africa. But the construction of Africa that they know and that is presented on a regular basis is one of mystical places, secret rituals, spirits, gods, *orixás*, blood sacrifices and strange sexual habits.

Stories of Zimbabwean political corruption, vote rigging in Kenya, civil war in Sudan, peaceful elections in Ghana or Botswana, resurgence in cocoa and coffee in West Africa or a thousand other stories have no place. Is this any different from news coverage in North America or Europe? No. News of Africa is rarely deemed newsworthy in the notebooks of reporters, be they Brazilian, North American, British, French or otherwise. But what is interesting is that throughout Brazil—in Bahia, Rio, São Paulo, Minas Gerais and elsewhere—Black community groups and religious organisations are actively involved in trying to articulate an African-oriented identity, one that embraces the African, while also engaged in buying into and helping to manufacture a generalised and homogenised image of Africa. This should imply that, at the very least, a slightly more nuanced and detailed knowledge of African realities would prevail

throughout these communities. However, this is not so. Most community groups and movements that seek to articulate Blackness through Africanity seem intent on sticking to a generalised and romanticised image of Africa that reduces the incredible richness and diversity of that continent into a few key concepts and ideas.

Consequently, many Brazilians approach an interaction, a dialogue, with someone like Georgia holding an idea of Africa built not on regional, political and cultural nuance—something that despite his tall tales, Georgia is quite familiar with—but of ideas and symbols born of a homogenised and generalised construction of African-oriented Blackness. There is no need for members of Georgia's audience to travel to the cities of Cape Coast or Winneba or Ouidah or Badagry to hear stories of leopard hunts or slave castles. They are available, in an eminently personal, interactive and dialogic format right in their own backyard. Moreover, they are not filtered and processed through the lens of the popular media but recounted, person-to-person, by an African who, from the point of view of the audience, has first hand knowledge of these experiences. This, then, is the context within which we must understand Georgia's Munchausen-like tales of African bush, gods, chiefs, princes and 'tigers'. Georgia weaves his tales in the way he does not because he truly believes that his audience is naïve or that he himself believes these stories. Rather, he, like any good storyteller, knows what his audience wants to hear. His narrative of the Aboakyer is configured precisely to mediate ideas about Africa that Georgia knows will be devoured by those

listening. The story itself is a note in the ongoing dialogue between Africa and Afro-America and contained within are symbols that are seen by those taken by Georgia's charisma as thoroughly African.

Moreover, these stories are part and parcel of his main source of income. Working as, in his words, a 'Rasta-African Guide to Africa in Brazil', his clients include Black Americans visiting "Brazil—Outpost of Africa" (Avocet Travel 2008), tourists from São Paulo, Rio and other parts of Brazil and South America, and European visitors who need a tour guide who can speak English. Through these jobs Georgia makes his contacts and connections with *terreiros* and community group members seeking to learn about Africa or who want to have an African as a friend. He also meets with carnival associations or bar owners in this capacity who patronize *terreiros* and might be able to give an African 'master drummer' like Georgia a job playing at a function or in their establishment.

I accompanied Georgia on a number of evenings as he guided and regaled his small groups of tourists to *terreiros*, usually groups of Black Americans, who typically resided in the *pousadas* and guest houses of the neighbourhoods surrounding Salvador's old city—Pelourinho. Georgia had made sure that many of the hotels, restaurants and other hospitality establishments around his home neighbourhood of Saúde, also close to Pelourinho, had his number and business card which read, in English, Portuguese and French "For a true African experience, who you gonna call?" These were informal tours—Georgia does not take credit cards, had no office and no employees, other than a small group of

youths in their mid-twenties who were part of his band and who were members of the local *terreiro* where he took all his clients. These young men and women looked up to their charismatic leader with considerable devotion.

Georgia did everything by mobile phone. On more than a few occasions, I would be out with him enjoying some cold beers in the frequently oppressive and sweaty heat of the Bahian evening when he'd get a call from some small hotel or restaurant operator that they had a group of people who wanted a real *terreiro* tour, an 'authentic' tour, not like the ones offered by the big travel agencies in Pelourinho. When the restaurateur or hotelier informed their guests that he could provide them with a 'real African' to guide them, the opportunity was usually snapped up—this is what Georgia relied on. Georgia has no steady salary or income, is living in Brazil without papers, and survives, for the most part, hand-to-mouth, week-to-week. One week he may be playing Afrobeat and reggae music at a Pelourinho bar, the next week, providing *terreiro* tours, and the next, working to try and import West African handicrafts, from either Accra or Lagos, for sale in Pelourinho shops.

Georgia's dream, he tells me, is to save up enough money to open his own bar that he intends to call "Sankofa." Sankofa is an Akan word that means 'return' or 'go back and take' and is represented by an Asante Adinkra symbol that depicts the necks of two swans turning their heads backwards to form a heart image. Adinkra symbols are used by the Asante to express proverbs and philosophical ideas and Sankofa has since been adopted by Black American

'roots' and 'back to Africa' groups as a symbol of return to an African cultural source. Georgia hopes that his bar will attract the increasing numbers of Black American tourists visiting Salvador and also Afro-Brazilians looking to, as he puts it, socialise "in an African environment". He tells me he has dreams of painting the bar in bright green, red and yellow colours, with portraits of great African and Black leaders on the walls like Kwame Nkrumah, Nelson Mandela, Muhammad Ali, Malcolm X, Martin Luther King, Sekou Touré, Haile Selassie, Bob Marley, Gilberto Gil, Zumbi and others. In his dream, he adds:

We have to try and get African beer like Guinness Malta, Star or you know, when I worked the ship out of Lagos, we always got this beer from Kenya called Tusker with an elephant on the front. This Brazilian beer tastes terrible. Plus we can try and have bands come from Lagos, Accra, Dakar and then these Brazilians can see that Africa is not just *djembe* drums, Guinea-style dancing and *orixá* music or *Afoxé*.²³

During one tour, Georgia asked me if I might help him out as two of the individuals in the group he was to lead were apparently practitioners of *Santería* or *regla ocha* from Cuba and that his Spanish was not very good. "Why would members of a Cuban *terreiro* need a guide? Surely they have connections with Brazilian *terreiros*?" I asked Georgia. "No," he told me, "these are students from Cuba who are studying at UFBa, whose parents are *Santeros*, but who know nothing about Brazilian *Candomblé*. I met them at the reggae bar in Rio

²³ *Afoxé* is a secular manifestation of the music typically played in *Candomblé terreiros*. The basic rhythm of the *terreiro* chant is called *ijexá*, and this backbeat now serves as an underlying rhythm for much popular music in Brazil, including *Afoxé*. Interview with Georgia, Salvador, Bahia, Brazil, 14/11/2005.

Vermelho [another neighbourhood in Salvador], but they don't speak Portuguese yet and only speak Spanish or French. But you speak Spanish, no?" "Not too badly," I told Georgia, "but *Cubanos* speak very fast, so don't blame me if I get lost sometimes." Ultimately, only one of the young Cuban students joined us, along with a group of Black American students from Howard University who were studying at UFBa and whom Georgia had met during daytime wanderings through the city.

Many tourist companies and travel agencies offer *terreiro* tours for they are considered one of the essential experiences of any visit to Salvador. Georgia's angle is that he can offer a perspective that no Brazilian can: an African perspective on what is marketed as an African tradition. We all gathered at a bar just off the main plaza in the Pelourinho area called *Praça da Sé*, and set off walking towards Georgia's home neighbourhood of Saúde. We descended out of the old city on the cobblestone streets, across the famous *Baixa dos Sapateiros* or 'cobbler's low area', up towards the Igreja da Saúde and then down into some twisting alleys and back roads until we arrive, about forty-five minutes later, at a small cinder-block building tucked in behind an auto-mechanic's garage and shaded by a number of large and overgrown mango trees. We can still hear the sounds of the city and the shouts and calls of neighbours yelling to each other in the apartment building overhead. We can feel the thumping sound of a stereo system turned up too loud in a car parked in the mechanic's lot, reverberating with such intensity that the vehicle body shakes and the music become

indiscernible. We can see neighbours and friends sitting on white, moulded-plastic patio chairs at a nearby *lanchonete* or cantina, enjoying some refreshment. There is no doubt that we are still in Brazil, still in Salvador, yet Georgia's clients start whispering to each other, that this must be just like the streets of an African city, or a city in which "Black people are the majority." Another member of the group, one of the Howard students named James, says, "This is just like a hot sweaty night in Sandtown. African neighbourhoods are the same everywhere!" — Sandtown-Winchester is one of historically Black neighbourhoods of Baltimore in the United States. We enter the small *terreiro* and take seats, more of those ubiquitous white plastic chairs, with *reservada* notes placed on the seats and begin waiting.

Now, the present work is not about religion or religiosity and so I do not recount here the many elements of ritual and practice that make up a typical *Candomblé* ceremony. Other ethnographers have covered this territory in far more detail (see Braga 1998). Further, I will not dwell on the anthropology or psychology of trance and possession. Similarly, this has been covered far more capably in other work and is of no direct relevance to this study (see Boddy 1988; Boddy 1989; Bourguignon 2004; Boyer-Araújo 1993; Corin 1979; Edge 1996; Halperin 1995; Hess 1989; Lambek 1980; Lehmann 2001; Lewis 1971, 2003; Van De Port 2005; Wafer 1991). Rather, this study is about how Black peoples in Bahia use the *terreiro* as one mode of reconstructing collective self-identity towards Africa and towards the engagement of other Black communities in the

Americas in a discourse about African-oriented Blackness. To that end, I include here only a very rudimentary description of the richness and variety of ritual action that occurs during the course of an evening session of worship and celebration.

Most *Candomblé* rituals are divided into two main parts: the preparation and dressing of the *terreiro*, which is considered worship in-and-of itself, and the actual possession ritual. The preparatory phase for a *Candomblé* ceremony can start anywhere from one day to one week in advance of the actual event and during this period initiates and devotees will wash all of the white clothes to be worn by participants, decorate the house with paper flags and candles in colours appropriate to the *orixás* that are to be venerated and prepare food for the banquet. Domestic animals such as fowl and goats may be slaughtered and offered in honour of particular deities or lesser spirits and finally, on the morning of the ceremony, the *jogo de búzios*, or cowrie shell divination, is performed for petitioners. During the possession phase of the public ceremony, *filhos dos santos*, or followers-in-saint, will enter a central area of the house and begin dancing and chanting to a repetitive drum rhythm. Under the leadership of a *pai de santo* or *mãe de santo* [father or mother in saint], the *filhos* or initiates will, one by one or sometimes, several at once, become ‘mounted’ or possessed by different *orixás* and *exus* or messenger spirits. Possession will continue for minutes or for hours, depending on the individual and during this period, the possessed individual will often speak in tongues, reciting liturgical Yoruba

phrases and acting as a mouthpiece for the spirit. The purpose of the ceremony is to spiritually cleanse and heal those participating and those who have come to petition the *orixás* for their divine intercession. The ceremony is not over until the last *orixá* has fled his or her host. After this, a banquet is held in honour of the deities 'work' here on earth.

Instead of the details of religious practice, I wish to focus on the ways in which Brazilians and Black American tourists present spoke of the ceremony and the *imprimatur* of authenticity that Georgia's presence seemed to provide for certain members of the congregation and, most certainly, for the group of travellers we brought to the *terreiro*. I focus on Georgia and his friends, as they appear to be touchstones for identity discourses about Africanness and Blackness. Through Georgia, groups of Bahians who wish to engage in an African-oriented expression of their Black identity find someone who can vouch for their legitimacy, someone who, at the very least, can be used as a signifier or marker of ethnic membership or, when he's really working and telling his tall tales, be used as a proxy for an African experience that most residents of Salvador will never experience. This is what draws people to Georgia, what makes him a popular tour guide and why his name is known in *terreiros*, Black community centres, carnival associations, bars, restaurants and hotels throughout the city. Ethnographically, Georgia and his Nigerian friends are important nexus points of information and data pertaining to identity discourse in Bahia. As I emphasised earlier, I take Scott's (1991) exhortation that we focus on

how concepts like Africa pattern and configure the processes of identity construction most seriously. In Georgia, I could have found no better conduit or lightening rod for this kind of talk.

During the banquet after the evening's celebration, I sat down with Georgia, the *mãe de santo* of the *terreiro*, the young Cuban student and James. Georgia's Brazilian girlfriend had joined us, but some of the other students from the U.S. had decided that the hour was too late and had headed home. The *mãe*, a woman in her sixties, knew Georgia well and she told me that he is the only person she will allow to bring foreigners or outsiders into the *terreiro*. Hers is not a large *terreiro* like Opô Afonjá or Casa Branca, nor particularly famous, as she explained:

A gente não tem as luminárias famosas como os outros terreiros. Aqui temos só as pobres, as pessoas da rua, e povos que trabalham! Somos uma comunidade pobre, e 99.99% de nossos filhos são negros. Mas, muitos das participantes dos terreiros ricos são os políticos, os professores como você e outros. Eu permito Georgia a trazer estrangeiros aqui, porque a gente precisa o dinheiro e também, queremos mostrar nossas tradições, nosso patrimônio, pra as outras populações afro-descendente, como você de Cuba, dos Estados Unidos. Georgia entende tudo isso, porque ele é da África. Ele entende nossos rituais e ele pode ser um bom exemplo pra nossas crianças—um homem Africano²⁴

[We don't have famous luminaries like the other *terreiros*. Here, we have only the poor, the people of the street and those that work for a living. We are a poor community and 99.99% of our devotees are

²⁴ Interview with the *mãe* of a small *terreiro* in the Saúde neighbourhood of Salvador, Bahia, Brazil. 16/11/2005. The *mãe* requested anonymity for herself and the *terreiro* because of her critical stance towards the larger and richer *terreiros* in Salvador and their leaders.

Black. But, many of the participants of the rich *terreiros* are politicians, professors or other rich people. I allow Georgia to bring foreigners here because we need the money, and we want to show our traditions, our heritage for other populations descended from Africa, like you from Cuba, or you from the United States. Georgia understands this, because he's from Africa. He understands our rituals and he can be a good example for our children—an African man]

I questioned the *mãe* about Georgia's role. How could Georgia, who is Fanti from Ghana, be a good example for your group if *Candomblé* was based on Yoruba practice and on the Yoruba *orixás*? She responded that all Africans have a shared understanding of spirits and mystical beings and that people descended from Africa have the same insight, which is why James could understand the practice in the *terreiro*, or the descendant of a slave from Cuba, but not a stranger like me. Simply through being around Georgia, engaging and conversing with Georgia, the members of her congregation, the *mãe* told me, could learn something about Africa. Georgia chimes in: "in Africa we have more than gods and spirits but we also worship the ancestors with shrines. That is why a Ghanaman can talk to Yorubaman about the spirits because we all believe in the ancestors, like what you would call your great, great, grandparents." To this, I declined to tell Georgia that I had also researched and written about earth and ancestor shrines in his home country of Ghana and was quite familiar with ancestor veneration in West Africa. At this point, James adds, "You just can't understand. We are all linked through being African in our heart. Georgia and all Africans have so much to teach the world about respect and pride and the beauty of being Black. Blacks have to accept that they are Africans, and not Americans

or Brazilians or Cubans.” There is no attitude of scepticism about Georgia’s right to speak to tour groups, to young members of the *terreiro* or to the leaders of these houses of worship on just about anything pertaining to Africa. He appears to have *carte blanche* to say just about whatever he wants when it comes to the subject of Africa.

Candomblé houses have been an important part of the Bahian and broader Brazilian religious scene for quite some time. They are not young or fledgling peripheral cults looking to rediscover ritual practice and long lost mystical formulae. The *terreiros* of Salvador are a religious and political force to be reckoned with and most are rightly self-confident in their position within Bahian society. Few *terreiros* have need of an imported African expert to tell them how to do things ‘properly’ and indeed some emphasise that Africans need to come to Brazil to learn how real African culture, unsullied by the evils of colonialism, have been kept alive.

Brazil is home to more than just *Candomblé*—other religious forms, such as *Umbanda* and *Xangô*, also embrace the pantheon of Yoruba deities and give them divine standing alongside the spirits of Amerindian warriors, departed slave spirits and Catholic saints. These religious forms are fully developed and mature forms of religious activity that have become, for the most part, fixtures on the Brazilian religious landscape and accepted as an alternative—especially for Afro-Brazilians—to Christian denominations. To be sure, they still receive occasional backlashes from militant evangelical groups, such as a recent event in Rio de

Janeiro state in which four members of the small but vociferous Igreja Evangélica Nova Geração de Jesus Cristo [New Generation Evangelical Church of Jesus Christ] broke into an *Umbanda terreiro* and smashed all of the status and icons of the *orixás* (Menchen 2008). For the most part, however, the *terreiro* has grown up and no longer hides from religious persecution in the same way that it did during the years of military rule in Brazil. Indeed, without the *terreiro* as a major attraction, the income earned by Bahia in tourism would be significantly reduced.

The fascination and special status attached to Georgia and other Africans in Salvador lies not in their ability to judge the veracity of their ritual but rather in their capacity to serve as markers of real Africanness in the identity discourse that has built up in and around the space of the *terreiro*. The *terreiros* have come of age, and consequently, Black communities and Black neighbourhoods attached or associated with these places of worship are starting to bring the African orientation of this religious space into the arena of identity politics. The *mãe* tells me:

Eu não precisa Georgia pra nada, nada! Sobre nossa religião, ele não pode me dizer nada sobre as orixás. Sou uma filha de Ogun. Ele é minha guia nesta vida e ele me diz os segredos deste mundo e do seguinte...ele me diz os segredos da mãe África! Mas, os olhos do Ogun são diferente. O perspectiva dele da África não é o perspectiva dos humanos. Pôr isso, a gente têm que aprender um pouco sobre a vida da África dos povos como Geórgia.

[I don't need Georgia for nothing, *nothing!* About our religion, he can't tell me nothing about the *orixás*. I'm a daughter of Ogun. He's my guide in this life, and he tells me about the secrets of this world and the next...he tells me the secrets of mother Africa. But the eyes of Ogun are different. His perspective on Africa is not the

perspective of humans. For this, we need to learn a little about African life from people like Georgia.]

The Cuban student adds, in half-Spanish–half-Portuguese, that Cubans are lucky because, through their history, they’ve come to have more contact with 20th century Africa. Through the different Marxist revolts in Africa, Cubans have to come to know many African countries and today, he tells me, some *Santería* centres count amongst their members Angolans, Sudanese, Guineans, Nigerians and others who have found themselves in “his country”. “You see,” Georgia says, “that is what Brazil needs. To know more about different countries in Africa other than Nigeria! Nigeria! Nigeria!”

There is a strange Ghanaian nationalism that bubbles up in Georgia when he starts talking about the dominance of Nigeria in the ethnic imagination of Afro-Brazilians interested in him or what he has to say. This fervour becomes apparent on the evening of our visit to the Saúde *terreiro* when a small group of young men and women ask Georgia about Yoruba classes and the Yoruba teacher at UFBa named Francis. The group informs Georgia that they could not afford to take the classes taught by Francis, who they have heard is a professor from Nigeria, and they want to know if there is some alternative way for them to learn how to speak Yoruba. Georgia tells them that they should go find one of the Nigerian students that live in the Nigerian house in the neighbourhood of Nazaré. This, Georgia tells me, is where he always loses out. He informs me that he doesn’t have the ability to teach the Yoruba language to Brazilians in Salvador:

All they want to do is learn Yoruba. They think that anything African equates to Yoruba. You can't tell them different. There are a few Muslims running around here also, they always want to learn Arabic but 99% of all Black Brazilians in Salvador who want to learn an African language think that Yoruba is the only language there is. Look at these kids. They get told about African gods and African spirits and think that Yoruba is the only way to understand Africa. I do what I can. Try to make money. But I can't get in on this market. This is where those Lagos boys succeed.

During one evening celebration, held in late November 2005 at the Saúde *terreiro*, during the *Mês da Consciência Negra* [Month of Black Consciousness], the *mãe* held an informal, though quite well attended Black consciousness rally in the small plaza adjacent to the centre. Georgia and I took part in this event, enjoying the camaraderie, cold drinks and freshly cooked 'African' food being served. Speakers included the *mãe* of the *terreiro*, some businessmen in the neighbourhood who were members of the congregation and a graduate student in history from CEAO who was also an infrequent attendee. The speakers discussed the need for all people of African descent in the neighbourhood to be proud of their African traditions, to be proud of their African heritage and '*sangue de África*' [African blood]. They noted that they were pleased to have with them tonight an anthropologist who had worked in West Africa [referring to me] and a famous "*personalidade*", known to all, direct from Africa. They were referring, of course, to Georgia. They went on to describe him as someone who was intimately familiar with the gods of Africa and who had lived in Lagos, an important city for the Yoruba people and for the *orixás*.

There was a decisively militant atmosphere to the evening. The

loudspeakers blared *Afoxê* music along with Brazilian reggae and James Brown's funk anthem, *Say It Loud—I'm Black and I'm Proud*, which seemed to be looped into the mix approximately every twenty minutes, though very few present could understand any English. The presenters were all extremely charismatic and all spoke to a need for Brazilian society to "finally" come to terms with the horrors of slavery and for "*Afro-descendentes*" [people of African descent] to stop apologising for their mixed heritage and to proudly assert that are "*negros*". They need to be, the *mãe* added, like Georgia—"*negro e orgulho*" [Black and Proud]. Many individuals came up to Georgia during the evening to ask him to how to say hello in Yoruba, how to say thank-you in Yoruba, about Yoruba clothes, about Yoruba food, indeed, about almost anything to do with his time in Lagos.

In events like this, there appears to be a clear break from the kind of nuanced racial and ethnic forms of classification found in documents like the 1976 census cited in the introduction. Words like *preto*, *pardo* or others were being replaced in the identity language surrounding a site like the *terreiro*, in bold and decisive ways, with a single phenotypic descriptor to describe all people with even the slightest possibility of African heritage—*negro*, or Black. For this group of Afro-Brazilians, Black meant a public expression of Africanity. Of course this small community of Salvador residents did not want to start speaking Yoruba as the principal language of communication, wearing printed West African cloth, give up eating staple such as *feijoada* and *churrasco* [beans and barbeque] or stop cheering for the Brazilian football team. Politically significant and public

assertions of identity are rarely about the mundane quotidian aspects of life but rather about the cultural practices and idealised notions of heritage that a community strategically and deliberately chooses to overemphasise as markers of membership. For this community, those key markers or points of contention are Africa oriented articulations of Blackness that dwell primarily on *elements* of Yoruba religious practice.

I emphasise *elements*, as it is important here to guard against conflating the reinterpretation of elements of cultural practice sourced from another society with some kind of extrapolation or remapping of the geographical territory occupied by that original society. Emphasising aspects of public identity, learning Yoruba or engaging in religious activity that incorporates or—as in the case of some *terreiros* that claim ‘purity’—replicates aspects of another culture, does not make the population *members* of that other society. Matory (2005), in *Black Atlantic Religion*, comes very close to asserting that because Yoruba culture was born out of trans-Atlantic dialogues—and he offers very convincing evidence to suggest that this is the case—Yoruba culture is, therefore, perhaps the first, truly Atlantic culture and that Yorubas can be found on both side of the Atlantic. Let me be clear: Afro-Brazilian communities that practice *Candomblé* and that assert an African-oriented Black identity are not members of Yoruba *society*. Brazilians engaged in these redefinitions of ethnic identity do not reckon kinship like Yoruba, get married like Yoruba, recognise the political authority of regional and village *obas* or chiefs and participate in any meaningful way in Yoruba social

life—they are and remain, Brazilians. Yet through the processes of conversing and engaging with individuals like Georgia and, as we shall see, other, more clearly defined agents of Yorubanness, they are being increasingly drawn into a global community of individuals who reckon Blackness through similar key symbols—of which Yoruba religious practice and basic linguistic ability are just two of these. But mediation of these *elements* of Yoruba culture does not imply membership in Yoruba society. Rather, through the process of trans-Atlantic dialogue between agents of Afro-Brazilian and West African society, both sides are increasingly involved in redefining what Blackness can, and for those invested in this process, *should* mean for all Black people.

Certainly we live in a globalised world in which the boundaries of identity, collectivity, nationality and other such social formations have become transregional. Yoruba, as an ethnic group, is no different, as it has large contingents living in London, New York, Toronto, Frankfurt and elsewhere that maintain important economic and political connections with the homeland. But although African ethnic identities are tricky and slippery things at times—*orixá* worship does not a Yoruba make. Ask any Ghanaian what Asante means, a Nigerian what Yoruba means or South African what Zulu means and you'll likely get an array of answers. "Someone born in Kumasi" or "Someone born in Lagos", "a person whose father is Yoruba" or "whose father is Zulu" or "whose mother is Asante" might be among the array of responses that one might receive. Ethnic identities in Africa, like those elsewhere in the world, shift and move according to

context and historical circumstance. However, there are certain elements of ethnic identification across the African ethnographic record that seem to hold fast as key signifiers of group membership. Among these, although it no longer holds the pride of place it once did in the discipline of anthropology, is kinship. It is still very hard to understand how African communities—especially at the village level—work without an understanding of that society's patterns of kinship. Afro-Brazilians who speak of Yorubanness, of the Yoruba language and religion as important components of their Blackness are in no way implicated in Yoruba patterns of kinship or in any other aspect of daily life in a Yoruba village—unlike expatriate communities of Yoruba emigrants living abroad. They must then be understood, first and foremost, as Brazilians.

Yoruba Language Instruction in Salvador

Now, if Georgia is involved in the formation and development of *general* ideas of Africanness and Yoruba culture in communities like that surrounding the Saúde *terreiro* and other locales, then Francis, the Yoruba teacher at UFBa, is actively engaged in promoting a specific form of dialogue between Black communities in Salvador and the Yoruba homeland of Ile-Ife. Francis is a scholar of European languages and in addition to speaking the English, Yoruba and Hausa of his native Nigeria, he also speaks Spanish, French and Portuguese. For almost six years he was seconded to the languages department of UFBa and in this position he was also a fellow at CEAO. Francis took up his position in Salvador with a long tradition of Yoruba instruction already in place at UFBa.

The exchange program between Obafemi Awolowo University in Ile-Ife and UFBa was started in the late 1970s with the help of the distinguished historian of Brazil in Africa and Africa in Brazil, Olabiyi Babalola Yai. Yai started Yoruba instruction at UFBa and has become enshrined in CEAO's pantheon of intellectuals who were actively involved with *terreiros* and with the place of CEAO as an important champion of African-oriented religious expression. Yai's (Babalola Yai 1997) position in the history of UFBa and the Black communities of Salvador anticipated Francis' involvement and was very much a contemporary recapitulation or reworking of the subject of his own research—Atlantic dialogue between Africa and the Americas. During the ceremony held for CEAO's forty-fifth anniversary in 2004, much of the evening was taken up by former students of the centre, many of them now members of larger and more dominant *terreiros*, others now professors at UFBa and some, members of Salvador's Black movement. They spoke of Yai's dedication to teaching Yoruba and to educating the people of Salvador about their African heritage. The Yoruba instruction program was presented, during this event, as one of CEAO's most important contributions to battling racism and religious intolerance in Salvador.

During his time in Brazil, Francis actively continued Yai's legacy at CEAO by becoming an enthusiastic and important authority on the Yoruba people, unofficial Yoruba ambassador and all-round expert on every aspect of African life relevant to the activities of Afro-Brazilian communities in Salvador. Francis, however, is a devout Christian. He did not worship at *terreiros* in Salvador and

did not, like some other Nigerian men in the city, market himself as a *babalaô* or fetish priest to *Candomblé* centres looking for African authenticity. Indeed, Francis actively speaks out against the small group of Nigerians from Lagos who have started to try and sell their services as official representatives of the *orixá* traditions in Nigeria. These individuals, most of them young men who have found themselves stuck in Brazil with no means or desire to return to Nigeria, will charge for official naming ceremonies for start-up *terreiros* or will bless smaller centres with, in the words of one of these entrepreneurs:

Lots of mumbo-jumbo while wearing Yoruba cloth! That's all you need. I'm no *babalaô*. I'm not even Yoruba. I'm an Igbo, but it doesn't matter. I can speak perfect Yoruba you know. Everyone in Nigeria can really speak Yoruba. This is the biggest problem with Brazilians and Europeans. They can only speak one or two languages. In Africa, when we are small boys, we can speak four or five languages. So now I'm here, I can go to this one *Candomblé* in Ondina [a Salvador neighbourhood] and make some money. People don't understand how many *Candomblés* there are in Salvador. There are the big ones that everybody knows, but there are hundreds and hundreds of small ones. That's what people don't know. You don't realise how many *terreiros* there are. That's where I can make some money. You can't go in to Casa Branca and pull this stuff. They are too arrogant. But some of these smaller ones, they don't know what they are doing but they are so eager to learn some small thing. To be honest, they don't really need me for anything about their rituals. They do their stuff. Some of it, I've seen in Nigeria, some of it is '*Feito no Brasil*' [Made in Brazil], Ha! More than anything they want me to come and just sit there in my robes and be like, an African presence. It's like they need it or something.²⁵

Georgia confirmed for me that some 'Lagos boys', as he calls them, are

²⁵ Interview with Adewale, Salvador, Bahia, Brazil, September 2005.

engaged in this kind of activity in Salvador. Apparently, one such individual who did not speak very good Portuguese even tried to induct Georgia into his operation, telling him that they could split the profits if he acted as his translator and assistant. Georgia asserts that:

This guy was no *babalaô*, but he really wanted to make some money. He told me that if I translated his Yoruba into Portuguese and acted like he was some holy man, that we could make some serious money. But this was too much for me. This guy was a real '419'-er²⁶ and if anybody found out what he was doing, he'd be for it.

In my first meeting with Francis, I had mentioned that I became aware of him through my interviews with Georgia. Francis spoke kindly of Georgia, noting, "Oh Georgia! He tries hard. He's always working some angle. But I like him because even though he pushes the line, he never crosses it. He never tries to pretend he's a *babalaô* like some of my countrymen here in Salvador." Francis continued:

I've been here for six years now. I've seen many anthropologists and sociologists come and go. Even this guy from Harvard. What's his name? Matory. That's it. He came here, and I knew he was here. He's done work in Yorubaland, in Nigeria. But he wasn't even aware that there were Nigerians working here in Salvador and didn't bother to contact me. They come here constantly and all they want to do is dive headlong in the *terreiro*. They are not interested in anything else. Most of the ones that come here, they already believe! That's the biggest problem. Half the researchers that come here looking to do a study already practice one of these religions or

²⁶ Section 419 is the portion of the Nigerian penal code that deals specifically with fraud and counterfeiting and so the term '419er' has become a popular slang term for con artists and swindlers of all sorts.

practice *capoeira* in their home country, and so come here deeply invested in *Candomblé*. You hear the same discourse over and over again. That these religions are a way for ‘sub-altern’ communities to resist the hegemonic power structures! Ha. I’m so sick of that word. In Salvador, *Candomblé* is mainstream! Listen, I’ll tell you straight. Every time that a *terreiro* has a celebration or anniversary or a Black consciousness rally, or the University holds a seminar about ‘African’ presence in Brazil, or there is a *palestra* [colloquia] about the *orixás* or religious intolerance, I’m at the top of the invitation list...My schedule is constantly booked and my wife constantly has to always keep my *gbariye* [the hand-woven smock worn by Yoruba men] clean. Once a week, I’m at some event talking about Yoruba customs and the *orixás*. I know about them because I am a Yorubaman, but so many people find it hard to believe that I am a practicing Christian. They think that because I am learned and an African, that I must practice traditional African religion. And not just commoners in small neighbourhoods, I’m talking about learned academics, many of which are white; they are bewildered that I could not be a *babalaô*. I am here as a linguist, not as a fetish priest, so I will go to the *terreiro* openings and anniversaries, I will attend the lectures—but not as a believer, just as an observer.²⁷

“Why then do you wear the *gbariye* to these events if you don’t want to come off as an authority on the Yoruba and their culture?” I asked. Francis looked at me with a smile and said:

I have to! You have to face the fact in Brazil, racism is everywhere and that the Blacks in this country are the poorest of the lot. Even the tribes in the Amazon are better off than the Blacks. When I first came here, I treated my job as just another teaching appointment. But after seeing the way that so many people want to use the *terreiro* and Yoruba culture as a way to be proud, I had to participate and contribute as much as I could...These people see my culture, Yoruba culture, as a way to talk about being Black. That, as a Yorubaman, makes me feel pride in my own culture. The Yoruba kings are the most renowned in all of Africa. It doesn’t matter what perspective you take...Look, you can be like the

²⁷ Interviews with Francis, Salvador, Bahia, Brazil, October-December, 2004.

historians here at UFBA who go to the *terreiro* and believe that what they do has been preserved by slaves and Blacks in Brazil through the centuries or you can be like Fry [he means Peter Fry] and say that the whole Yoruba emphasis in the *terreiros* was invented by Ramos and Nina Rodrigues and so on, or you can believe, like Matory, that Bomfim and his so-called English professors not only created the Yoruba emphasis here in Brazil but also created the Yoruba culture in Nigeria. Well you know what I think of that—The Yoruba culture is much older than his ‘Lagosian renaissance’. But it doesn’t matter what perspective you take. These people here are crying out for a new identity. They are crying out to be something other than *mulato* or *preto* or ‘*café-com-leite*’ and if they can find it through Yoruba culture then that is fine by me. But you should know this; I’m not some radical who thinks that they are all Africans here are Yorubas who are displaced through time and space. *Eles são Brasileiros* [They are Brazilians] and we Nigerians have a long history of interaction with this place. I don’t accept Matory’s ‘Atlantic origin of Yoruba’ theory, but at least in terms of people like Bomfim and others, then Yai, we Nigerians have an ongoing connection with this place.

I asked Francis a number of times about his own place in this ongoing dialogue between West Africa and Bahia. He’s reluctant to admit that he is involved and implicated in the process of Africanising the discourse on identity in Salvador. However, he is quick to point out that he thinks such a process has certainly guided the development of Afro-Brazilian culture. Francis is every bit the cultural broker and entrepreneur that Georgia is—Georgia operates at the street level, working in bars and restaurants, in local *terreiros* and at Black consciousness rallies; whereas Francis is every bit the scholar and due to his academic position as a teacher of language at UFBA, he is very much an elite negotiator of African and Yoruba-oriented Blackness.

Francis is emphatic about the details of his own African culture and, more than anything, he is very much involved in the dissemination of the Yoruba

language among young Afro-Brazilians. His classes at UFBa and CEAO are always overflowing with students and invariably there is a waiting list for registration. He typically teaches one class at the main UFBa campus and another at the CEAO offices that were up until recently located in the old city of Pelourinho. I joined Francis just after one of his classes ended [I was unable to get permission to sit in on the class]. The experience seemed something like escorting a celebrity or rock star away from one of their performances. Francis was mobbed with students asking him about this verb and that noun in Yoruba, about a particular Yoruba phrase they had found on the internet or saw written on a fetish doll that they had purchased at Abitok's, an 'African' boutique in Pelourinho run by another Nigerian resident in Salvador.²⁸ He tells me that this is a normal occurrence and that it usually takes him at least an hour after each class to deal with all of the questions and concerns of the students.

"They are very enthusiastic," Francis tells me, but he laments on the fact that all they ever want to know about Yoruba society are the *orixás*. "They become interested in Yoruba society because all of the prominent Black leaders in Salvador who speak of Africa or incorporate Africa into their political agendas emphasise the same things over and over again," Francis explains. "Not only

²⁸ Abitoks, owned and operated by a Nigerian woman named Lola Akanni, specialises in selling West African handicrafts from Senegal, Ghana and Nigeria. They usually stock a large array of drums, hand-woven and printed cloth, imitation *kente* cloth and most importantly, Yoruba smocks or *gbariye*. The store prides itself on supplying smocks to a number of important *babalaô* throughout the city who have been unable to make a trip to Nigeria to purchase their own.

that,” he adds, “there are some leaders here who think that they have a ‘*purier*’ form of Yoruba culture here in Brazil [emphasis his].” Francis makes an important observation here—he, quite sarcastically, replicates the phrase ‘*purier Yoruba culture*’ as used by many local Black leaders to describe *terreiro* activity and the concomitant identity discourse, not stronger or more devout expressions of religious belief but rather, stronger *culture*. The metonymical substitution of the entire Yoruba culture for elements of religious praxis is, I think, analogous to suggesting that because members of a particular society are devout and fervent adherents of Catholicism, that those individuals are somehow representative or embody Roman culture, or that ardent practitioners of Sunni Islam are in some way ‘carriers’ of ‘bearers’ of Arab Bedouin society. It’s a mistake of conflation that, as mentioned earlier, is committed with considerable regularity in Salvador and one that, although he rails against it, Francis is involved in perpetuating.

During 2005’s *Mês da Consciência Negra*, I accompanied Francis to Salvador’s famed carnival association Ilê Aiyê in the neighbourhood of Curuzu-Liberdade where he was to speak at a special seminar and public rally entitled ‘Reconnecting with Africa’. I met Francis at his home and waited for him to dress in his best golden *gbariye* with matching black with gold trim soft fez before we made our way to the carnival hall. When we arrived, Francis was taken aside and greeted by all of the leaders of the association or *bloco*. He was received with a great deal of formality and was introduced to the other speakers in something that seemed like a royal receiving line. “Professor Francis”, as he was called, had

come “all the way from Africa” and was presented as a noted authority on the Yoruba people, their language and their customs. When the evening finally got underway, Francis took his place at the panellist’s table along with two professors from UFBA, a Black community organizer from the nearby Northeast state of Sergipe, a *iálorixá* or *mãe* from a major *terreiro* in the neighbourhood of Engenho Velho and a Catholic seminary student from Angola who happened to be visiting Salvador.

The event began with an animated discussion of the recently enacted Lei 10.639 [Law 10.639]. This piece of legislation is widely seen as a crucial victory for Afro-Brazilian community groups as it enshrines in law the need for the teaching of Afro-Brazilian and African history in the national education system and recognizes the place of Black society in the formation of the Brazilian state. In the words of one of the speakers, the *terreiro* leader: “*A lei é nosso instrumento de pressão, e nos dá a capaz a ser orgulho sobre nossa identidade negra. Com esta lei, a gente pode ensinar nossas crianças sobre seu terra mãe—a África*” [The law is our instrument of pressure, and it gives us the ability to be proud of our Black identity. With this law, we can teach our children about their motherland—Africa.] The two professors present, one an anthropologist and the other a historian, seemed to concur, suggesting the models for instruction of African-oriented material should come directly from the kind of community development and after-school programs run by *blocos* like Ilê-Aiyê and many of *terreiros* in neighbourhoods like Curuzu-Liberdade or Engenho Velho.

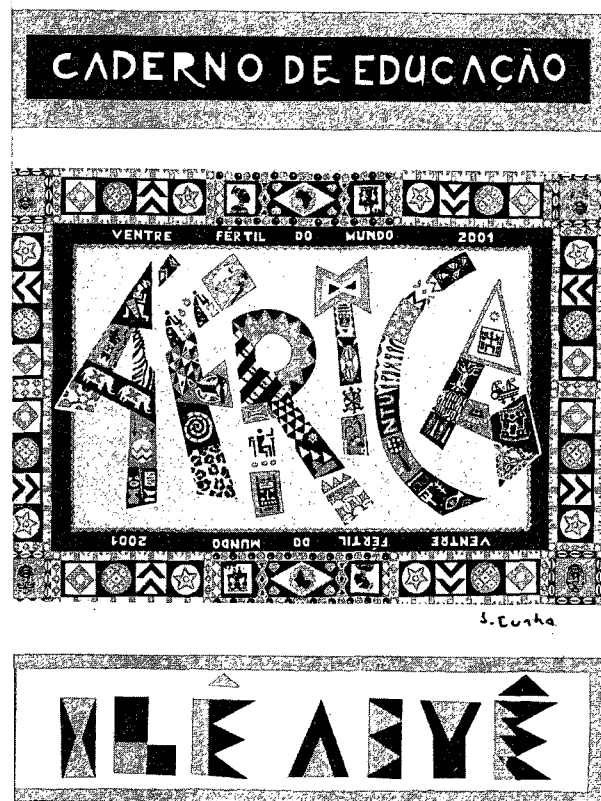


Figure 5.1 Ilê Aiyê's *África Caderno*

Using *cadernos* or workbooks that focus on art, poetry, stories and parables, primarily composed by community leaders or translated from African writings into Portuguese, Ilê-Aiyê has run a very successful children's program that emphasises the importance of African culture and pride in an Afro-Brazilian heritage. In one of Ilê-Aiyê's recent *cadernos* entitled *África: Ventre Fértil do Mundo* [Africa: Fertile Womb of the World] that is still used in the program, one finds discussions of the predominance of nature in African religions, the possibility of a Black origin for Egyptian civilization, West Africa's *griot* tradition, Islam in Africa, different African celebrations, Africa's oral traditions, war and disease in Africa, and other subjects. Here again, key symbols of Africa's

connection with spirituality, nature and orality are emphasised as the fundamental building blocks of an African-oriented Black identity.

There is much to admire in this thin children's workbook and certainly it could serve as a good starting point for a major shift in the Brazilian education system in terms of diversification and broadening horizons. Moreover, I cannot imagine that an increased awareness of other societies and other parts of the world through the use of course materials such as this book can have anything but a positive effect on the intellectual development of young people. However, from an analytical perspective and in terms of the processes of identity construction that are taking place in Bahia's Black communities, the *caderno* very much reinforces a very generalised and homogenised view of Africa as 'connected with nature' and a place that produces "*jorrando vida, conhecimento, espiritualidade, ritmo, música, de seu Ventre Fértil para o mundo inteiro*" [a gushing out of life, knowledge, spirituality, rhythm and music for the whole world in its open womb] (Ilê Aiyê 2001). Through these kinds of programs, the speakers continue, Brazilian schools can learn how to incorporate African material into the curriculum.

After this interaction, Francis begins to speak. Immediately he begins by addressing the need to recognise, more than just the general African contribution to the Brazilian society, but specifically the Yoruba contribution to the religious traditions and culture of Black Bahia. If anything is to be taught, he asserts, let that be taught—let teachers speak to their students of the kings and queens of

Africa, but let us not forget, he reminds us, where the most important kings and queens reside. “*Vocês não devem esquecer de que os mestres africanos das suas tradições eram os babalaôs e líderes do Iorubá*” [You must not forget that the African masters of your traditions were the priests and leaders of the Yoruba]. Francis suggests that the actions of many of the larger *terreiros*, who are increasingly asserting an anti-syncretistic and pro-Yoruba approach to their religious practice, are on the right track, that they are reclaiming their heritage from a past of “mixture and blending.” Similarly, Francis believes, if Black community groups want to assert an African element to their identity let it be a Yoruba element and not some watered down notion of Africanity. Throughout the Americas, Francis suggests, all Black societies have found their connection with the Yoruba people, whether it be in the practices of US-based groups like American Yoruba-Revisionism Movement, Oyotunji (see Palmié 1995), in the *regla ocha* or *Santería* of Cuba, or “*os grupos negros do Brasil*” [the Black groups of Brazil]

Although Francis sometimes resists his celebrity status as the most recent agent of Yorubanness in Salvador, he is very much aware of his role and his position, which he seems to use to support and encourage the privileging of Yoruba culture as the centrepiece of Black identity discourse. Whether through his courses of language instruction, his participation in events like the one described here or through his frequent appearances at *terreiros*, Francis has taken on a central role as an agent, indeed as a promoter, of Yorubanness in the

Black milieu of Salvador. Indeed, It would be hard to underestimate just how well known this one language professor has become. During my time in the city, I could not find one *terreiro*, one community centre or carnival association that had not heard or met Francis.

Francis, along with Georgia and other West African—primarily Nigerian—residents in Salvador, have been responsible in helping to build a continued emphasis on Africanity in the public representation of Black identity in Bahia. They have become important points of coalescence, charismatic individuals who are seen as embodying, quite literally, Africa and true African Blackness. Further, for groups like the *terreiros*, community organisations like Ilê Aiyê and Black leaders, these individuals provide a contemporary source of knowledge about African culture and African knowledge—one that is accessible and convenient. For although some groups have been able to fund the travels of their leaders to West Africa, to cities like Lagos and Ouidah in search of African tradition, for most their only connection with this ‘motherland’ is through reports on television and through their religious traditions.

Francis, Georgia and others have become embodied proxies for an entire continent; physical representatives of everything that those involved in making Black identity in Bahia want or require of Africa. They have become, through their talk and action, powerful allies in the movement to emphasise and mobilise the African orientation of many Black communities. Georgia uses storytelling, tours and performances at ‘reggae-roots’ bars; Francis, in his role as a venerated elder

of the Yoruba people, living and working in Brazil, employs other means, most notably his regular classes in Yoruba language instruction. But both individuals are implicated as preeminent participants in a continuing dialogue between Africa and Afro-America, specifically Afro-Brazil, about what Africa means and what an idea of Africa means to the notion of Blackness. Blackness not just in Brazil and confined to Afro-Brazilians, but to African interlocutors, to Cuban travellers, Black American tourists and exchange students and others from throughout the Black Atlantic world.

Chapter 6: Cultural Elites and Manifestations of Blackness

From a narrative perspective, this chapter picks up precisely where the previous chapter left off. Not just in terms of the continuing story of how African-oriented expressions of Black identity are manufactured and negotiated in Salvador, but also quite literally. The opening scene of this chapter is from the same event where we just left Francis emphasising the importance of Yoruba culture in the Black community's incorporation of Africa into their identity discourse. In this chapter, I seek to explore how elites within the Black community have been able to assert a powerful influence on the direction that they believe Black identity in Salvador should take. In returning to the 'Reconnecting with Africa' event at Ilê Aiyê, I begin a discussion of the impact that organisations such as this powerful *carnaval bloco* have on manifestations of Blackness that incorporate globalised ideas of Africanised Blackness.

In the community of Black associations and movements in Salvador, there are many divisions and tensions—some of them quite extreme. In the Afro-Brazilian religious sphere, minor cleavages exist between the different *terreiros* that claim origin from specific *nações* or fictively constructed African cultural origins. However, Yoruba or Nagô traditions are dominant and individuals like Francis are helping to increase the prominence of this form. All *terreiros* in Salvador, whether they claim Nagô, Jeje or Angolan heritage, worship *orixás*—

the name for the spirits or deities that comes directly from the Yoruba *órisá*. Indeed there are few concepts in the Bahian Afro-Brazilian religious vocabulary that are not of Yoruba origin.

The real divisions in the Black movements pertain to the influence that African-oriented groups—such as the *terreiros*—exert and the extent to which articulations of Afro-Brazilian identity should include African concepts and culture. There are many—perhaps even a majority of Black Bahians—who do not agree with the inordinate amount of attention afforded the Africa-centric movement and the dominant position that their assertions of Blackness assume within Brazilian society.

Blocos and Terreiros

*“Os Africanos têm que vir a nossa cidade, Salvador!
A beber na fonte da África Verdade!
Aqui, no Brasil, existe a cultura Africana pura!”*

“Africans have to come to our city, Salvador!
To drink at the font of True Africa
Here, in Brazil, exists the pure African culture!”²⁹

Valdina Pinto (Salvador, Bahia, Brazil, 2007)

These words were uttered at a forum on ‘reconnecting with Africa’ at the famed *carnaval bloco*, Ilê Aiyê, in Salvador in November 2005 by a noted religious leader and professor in Salvador. Ilê Aiyê is the oldest *bloco*

²⁹ Reconnecting with Africa Forum entitled *A África na visão dos Africanos e a África na visão dos Afro-Baianos* held at Bloco-Afro Ilê Aiyê, Salvador, Bahia, Brazil, November 2005.

carnavalesco or carnival association in Salvador devoted exclusively to the city's Black population and is widely regarded as the most 'African' of these organisations.

During the 1920s as Freyre, Ramos and others were writing about what it meant to be Brazilian, particularly in the context of the country's growing urban environment, community leaders in Rio de Janeiro attempted to reinvent the annual February carnival as an expression of national culture and something uniquely Brazilian. Part of this reinvention was to try and organize the mass confusion of the pre-Lenten festival into some kind of order. The cultural elite of Rio organized carnival participants into a hierarchy of organizations with the exclusive and invariably white-only *sociedades carnavalescas* or *grandes sociedades* at the top and more populist *blocos*, *ranchos* and *cordões* at the lower end. Brazilian anthropologist Roberto DaMatta has written, "it was not Brazil that invented *carnaval*; on the contrary, it was *carnaval* that invented Brazil" (1984:245). There's considerable insight in this assertion, for although *carnaval* has become a stereotyped, clichéd and all-too commercialised display of everything that is good, bad and exotic about Brazil, there are few better manifestations of Leach's (1954:15) observation that ritual makes the social structure explicit. *Carnaval* is Brazilian society writ large and in it, all of the nuances of Brazil's eternal albatross—race relations—are played out again and again each February.

For much of the 20th century, the racial hierarchy of Brazilian society was

replicated in the organisation and presentation of carnival. Only in the late 1970s, as Brazil started to move away from the extremes of military rule, did movements aimed at mobilising and radicalising the Black population start to emerge. It was an uphill battle as the ideology of racial democracy asserted that such a struggle was, of course, unnecessary. However, eventually a diverse array of politically motivated organisations aimed at derailing the myth of racial democracy and fighting for Black people in Brazil started to coalesce in locales like Rio, São Paulo and Salvador. These groups, like the Movimento Negro Unificado (MNU), emphasised Black consciousness, valorisation of Afro-Brazilian religious forms and militant viewpoints that stood in opposition to the dominant social institutions of Brazil—including *carnaval*.

In 1974, Antonio Carlos dos Santos Vovô—also known simply as ‘Vovô’—founded Bloco-Afro Ilê Aiyê in Salvador. Ilê Aiyê was the first carnival *bloco* composed of, and dedicated to, serving the Afro-Brazilian community in Salvador—especially Curuzu-Liberdade, an urban neighbourhood of Salvador that today boasts the largest Black population in Brazil. Vovô had been inspired by the Black Power movements in the United States and by the inchoate Black cultural groups in Rio and elsewhere to create a new kind of space in Brazil—one only for Blacks. Further, this would be a space that would be militantly pro-Black and pro-African and one that would seek to emphasise the global contribution of Black peoples to world history, much like the vindicationist work of the Harlem Renaissance. Vovô was also much inspired by the events of the 1977 Second

World Black and African Festival of Arts and Culture in Lagos, Nigeria or, as it is commonly known, FESTAC '77. FESTAC was a cultural high-water mark in the ongoing dialogue between Africa and the Black world. Leaders, community organisers, musicians and cultural elites from Brazil were all present at the event. The main attraction of the festival were the daily musical performances but these were complemented by daily debates and colloquia attended by Black scholars from around the world, including Brazil, who discussed the need for dramatic and immediate change in global Black society—to 'reawaken' Black society, as it were (Foundation for Research in the Afro-American Creative Arts 1977). In the wake of this event, Black community groups and the Black movements in Brazil were re-energised and revitalised by FESTAC with the belief that Africa must be an important part of their future. FESTAC set a defiant and strident tone—one that would be echoed in work of community organisers like Vovô in the early years of Ilê Aiyê.

As discussed in chapter 1, racial classification in Brazil, although it has evolved significantly since the 1970s, is still very much based on subtle and very specific gradations in phenotypic indices. Three decades ago, though, during the founding of Ilê Aiyê, the test for admission was simple, emphatic and perhaps represented the surfacing of a more dichotomous approach to race. An individual petitioning for admittance into the *bloco* would have their skin scratched: If it turned grey-white or 'ashen grey', then they were permitted to be a member; If their skin did not change colour after being scratched, they were considered

white and not allowed for membership³⁰—the idea here being that only people of African ancestry had the kind of skin that turned grey when scratched. Though this test is no longer used, Ilê Aiyê still only accepts members of Black heritage. At a public forum held for a visiting Nigerian journalist at Ilê Aiyê in March 2005, an Ilê Aiyê member noted:

Ilê Aiyê has always been a group that only accepts people of African descent. Critics say we are being racist, that we are fighting racism with racism. But we are the only *bloco* that has succeeded in resisting the pressure to admit non-Blacks. This is because Ilê Aiyê exists to serve the Black community of Curuzu-Liberdade. Here in this neighbourhood, where there exists so many *terreiros*, we have the strength and support to stick to our principals.³¹

Ilê Aiyê's involvement with the Salvador carnival since 1974 has very much served to 'Africanise' the event. Now a number of other so-called '*blocos-afros*' exist in Salvador. Groups with names such as Ara Kétu, Gunga, Malê Debalê, Malcom X, Mundo Negro, Olodum, Oriobá, Quilombo, Tempero De Negro and others have become regular fixtures on the streets of Salvador during *carnaval*.³²

³⁰ Interview with A.C.A. and B.R., Salvador, Bahia, Brazil, November 2004. This history of club-membership criteria was confirmed to me in a number of conversations that I had with Ilê Aiyê members and is confirmed by Matory's (2005:255) personal communication with Antonio Carlos dos Santos Vovô. Incidentally, on one occasion, a member performed this scratch test on me and asserted that, despite my South Asian ancestry, I would've been eligible for membership in the 1970s.

³¹ Presentation held in English for a visiting Nigerian journalist celebrating the music of Fela Kuti, Salvador, Bahia, Brazil, March 2005.

³² The February festival has become big business in Salvador and is considered by many in Brazil to be the 'real' carnival to attend in order to avoid the commercialism of Rio—many of the blocos-afros in Salvador will charge locals and tourists alike upwards of one thousand dollars to participate in the street parade as a dancer or reveller.

All of the *blocos-afros* groups take their name from some aspect of African or Afro-American culture. Some reference the history of Black resistance in the Americas through the evocation of the famed Black American civil rights leaders like Malcom X. Others use names that hearken back to the bygone era of the *quilombo* or, the maroon slave communities—the most famous being Palmares. Other groups such as Ilê Aiyê and Ara Kétu take their names from concepts or phrases in Yoruba and assert a direct link with the *Candomblé terreiros* and with Yoruba culture.

Ara Kétu, certainly one of the more upscale *blocos* with a modern boutique that sells music and paraphernalia in the rich and tourist neighbourhood of Barra, takes its name from a cognate of the Yoruba ethnonym Quêto or Kétou. Kétou is a specific Yoruba town close to the border with Nigeria in the People's Republic of Benin and a chiefdom within the broader Yoruba kingdom. Slaves shipped to Brazil from Porto Novo in Benin were often labelled with this *nação*.

Olodum, another popular *bloco-afro* and cultural group, takes its name from an *orixá* and has become particularly famous abroad for their performance with the musician Paul Simon on his *Rhythm of the Saints* album. Due to this, Olodum has become a major attraction in Pelourinho, putting on major concerts every Tuesday in the central plaza of the old city. During *carnaval*, Olodum's drumming ensemble is a major participant, but members also see their involvement in *carnaval* as a political statement. Olodum maintains a children's educational program, like Ilê Aiyê, for young people living in the poorer, primarily Black

neighbourhoods, and members openly describe their mission as one of defeating racism and, according to their website, “*o desenvolvimento da cidadania e preservação da cultura negra, oferecendo um saber afro brasileiro e novas formas de conhecimentos adicionais àqueles adquiridos no sistema formal de ensino*” (Olodum 2008) [development of citizenship and the preservation of Black culture, through the delivery of Afro-Brazilian knowledge and ways of knowing that supplement those found in the formal education system].³³

Olodum's principal mode of communication with the public is through its drumming performances in Pelourinho, during *carnaval* and at other events, both in service of movements like *Mês da Consciência Negra* [month of Black consciousness] or for the tourist industry. Olodum is explicit that drumming, especially their particular brand of powerfully rhythmic and syncopated drumming that has become synonymous with Salvador and its *carnaval*, is essentially African in nature—that this kind of drumming speaks to the African “spirit”³⁴ of Bahian society. Here again, we see an example of Africanity in Salvador being reduced to certain key metaphors, such as ‘drum’ and ‘spirit’, as markers or signifiers of Blackness. A teenaged girl named Francesca, a member of Olodum whom I interviewed after one of their performances in Pelourinho, put it best when she told me: “*Olodum é como os tribos da África. Como o loruba ou Jeje,*

³³ Translated by author.

³⁴ Interview with Waldemar, drummer for Olodum, Salvador, Bahia, Brazil, November, 2004.

*Olodum é meu tribo!*³⁵ [Olodum is like the tribes of Africa. Like the Yoruba or *Jeje*, Olodum is my tribe!"]

Of all of *blocos*, Ilê Aiyê remains perhaps the most famous in Salvador. The group takes its name from a Yoruba phrase that translates to 'life', 'the world' or—according to many of the young children who can frequently be found running through the halls of the cavernous building that houses the organisation—'big house'. Ilê Aiyê overtly emphasises the importance that Bahians of African descent should, though are not required to, be participants in one of the Afro-Brazilian religions of Brazil or at the very least be sympathetic to the *terreiros*. Though not involved with outward proselytising, the *bloco* is actively involved with *terreiros* throughout Salvador and maintains a special relationship with the Ilê Axé Jitolu *terreiro* in the neighbourhood of Curuzu-Liberdade.

Ilê Axé Jitolu claims to be a house of the Jeje-Nagô 'nation' or *nação*. By this, it is meant that the religious practice of this *terreiro* largely follows the patterns of the Nagô or Yoruba and the Jeje—generally regarded as the combined ethnic complex of the Ewe and Fon speakers that borders Yorubaland to the west. There are very few houses in Bahia that claim to be exclusively Jeje in practice and most of them now incorporate aspects from the more popular, famous and influential Nagô houses. Indeed, Jeje practice is, on the whole, in decline in Salvador, with very few houses claiming to be 'purely' Jeje in practice.

³⁵ Interview with Francesca, drummer for Olodum, Salvador, Bahia, Brazil, November, 2004.

Today, such little difference actually exists in the practice of Nagô and Jeje houses, that to assert clearly defined ethnic origins to their traditions is to essentially reify categories that no longer truly exist, if they ever did.

Mãe Hilda, as the *mãe de santo* or *íálorixá* [mother-in-saint or head priestess] of the Jitolu *terreiro*, has become a prominent figure in the religious and political life of Salvador and also enjoys a degree of prominence at the national level for her work in championing the construction of a memorial for the maroon slave leader, Zumbi dos Palmares. In 1988, Mãe Hilda, along with Vovô, started a one-room remedial school for children from impoverished Black families in Curuzu-Liberdade who had failed in Brazil's public education system. Called Escola Mãe Hilda, it was located within the grounds of the *terreiro* and was aimed at improving literacy skills among troubled youth.

Now, however, the school has become one of the primary community outreach projects of the *bloco*, outside of the yearlong preparation for and participation in the carnival. The *escola*, in addition to teaching basic academics, also involves students in religious education and emphasises the importance of the *terreiro* and 'African' religious life for all *afro-descendentes* or 'peoples of African descent.' In conversations and interviews conducted with a former teacher at the school, I was informed:

Os estudantes na escola aprendem como a viver com o mundo natural, que é o espaço de que vêm os espíritos Africanos. Eles começam a fazer atitudes e posturas novas para o valor de suas culturas negras, culturas africanas. Mesmo que tenhamos

*estudantes aqui que praticam religiões diferentes em suas famílias, é importante que eles aprendem os principais do terreiro: respeito pra os velhos, respeito pra os outros e respeito também pra o mundo natural e o meio ambiente. Aqueles valores são da África...especialmente o respeito pra os velhos. Atitudes como isso refletem na vida da família...recebemos notícias de suas famílias que o comportamento dos estudantes melhoraram. Essas coisas, eles não podem aprender nas escolas Brasileiras, somente aqui, em nossa escola, porque é mais Africana.*³⁶

[Students at the school learn to live with the natural world, which is the space from which African spirits come from and start to have new attitudes and 'postures' towards the value of their Black culture, their *African* culture. Even though we have students here that come from different religious background, it is important that they learn the principals of the *terreiro*: respect for elders, respect for each other and respect for the natural world and environment. These are values from Africa...especially respect for elders. These new attitudes are reflected in the families...we hear reports from families and they say that the student's behaviour improves. These are not things that the students can learn in Brazilian schools. Only in our school, because it is more African.]

From Ilê Aiyê's website:

O Ilê Aiyê através da música, contou a história da África, pré-colonial, descreveu seus reinos e impérios, cantou a história do povo negro no processo de construção do Brasil e da América do Norte, cantou as revoluções negras que buscaram a igualdade e combateram o preconceito, os seus líderes e heróis; compôs canções que vem elevando a estima da população negra, principalmente da mulher, enfim, vem contribuindo para a redução das desigualdades raciais promovendo educação através da história e da cultura. (Associação Cultural Bloco Carnavalesco Ilê Aiyê 2007)

[Ilê Aiyê, through music, recounts the history of pre-colonial Africa, describing its kingdoms and empires; singing the story of Black people in the construction of Brazil and North America; singing of Black revolutions fought for equality and to end prejudice; of

³⁶ Interview with G.C.N, a former part-time teacher at Escola Ilê Aiyê, Salvador, Bahia, Brazil, October, 2004.

leaders and heroes; composing songs that elevate and raise the esteem of the Black population; contributing to the reduction of racial inequality and promoting education through history and culture.]³⁷

Ilê Aiyê is now much more than merely a carnival association—it is a cultural juggernaut in Bahia, eulogised in popular songs and television programs, and known throughout the country not only as the most African *bloco*, but also as the *bloco* that has the most contemporary connections with Africa. They are also known nationwide for another reason—they are the only *bloco-afro* in Salvador that has received ‘official’ sponsorship from Brazil’s largest beer company.³⁸ Ilê Aiyê is a force actively involved in shaping and, to some extent, dictating a construction of Blackness in Bahia and in Brazil that emphasizes the slave past and Africa as key signifiers of Afro-Brazilian ethnic identity. Ilê Aiyê receives funding from a number of government agencies in Brazil for its projects, including the Ministry of Culture. The current ‘Ministro de Estado da Cultura’—minister for culture—in Brazil is the world-famous Baiano musician and entertainer Gilberto Gil, who has been involved with musical collaborations in the United States, Europe and Africa and was present in Lagos at FESTAC ‘77. His personal commitment to the *bloco* has ensured the group’s prominence on the Brazilian stage and invariably, when the national media wants commentary on Black

³⁷ Translated by author.

³⁸ During *carnaval*, Brahma, the largest producer of beer in Brazil, proudly advertises itself as the official beer of Ilê Aiyê and includes African imagery, pan-African colours and cowrie shells in its advertisements.

issues, the leaders and members of Ilê Aiyê are often first on the list.

Ilê Aiyê also receives funding and support from a special agency within the Ministry of Culture—the Fundação Cultural Palmares. This foundation is named for the *quilombo* of Palmares and, as stated on its website, its mission is to promote the preservation of what they term Black “cultural, social and economic values” and the “*influência*” of Black society in the formation of Brazil (Fundação Cultural Palmares 2007). Ilê Aiyê, in all aspects of its work, attempts to conform very much to this mission statement.

Much of the external funding that Ilê Aiyê receives goes towards the educational project but also helps support projects such as *Mês da Consciência Negra* (Month of Black consciousness), *Beleza Negra* (a Black beauty pageant), lectures, forums, and a calendar full of other events, all aimed squarely at advancing the idea that Blackness in Brazil *must* be about Black power and reconnection with Africa as a source of identity and culture.

However, Ilê Aiyê is not alone in terms of the influence it wields in the area of Black identity discourse. It forms, along with other carnival associations and *blocos-afros*, an important part of the complex of leaders, religious elites, government agencies, entrepreneurs, literati and intelligentsia in Bahia who are active participants and stakeholders in directing and determining public discourse about Blackness in Brazil. Members of these groups include: religious leaders from the powerful Nagô *Candomblé* houses such as Ilê Axe Opô Afonjá and

Casa Branca; a new generation of anthropologists, historians and other social scientists from the Universidade Federal da Bahia; the *blocos-afros*; government agencies such as Palmares; and more recently, cultural brokers and entrepreneurs from West Africa such as Georgia. These groups seek to define not only what it means to be Black in Brazil but also attempt to limit and curtail what aspects of Black Brazilian society are relevant to the general discourse on national identity.

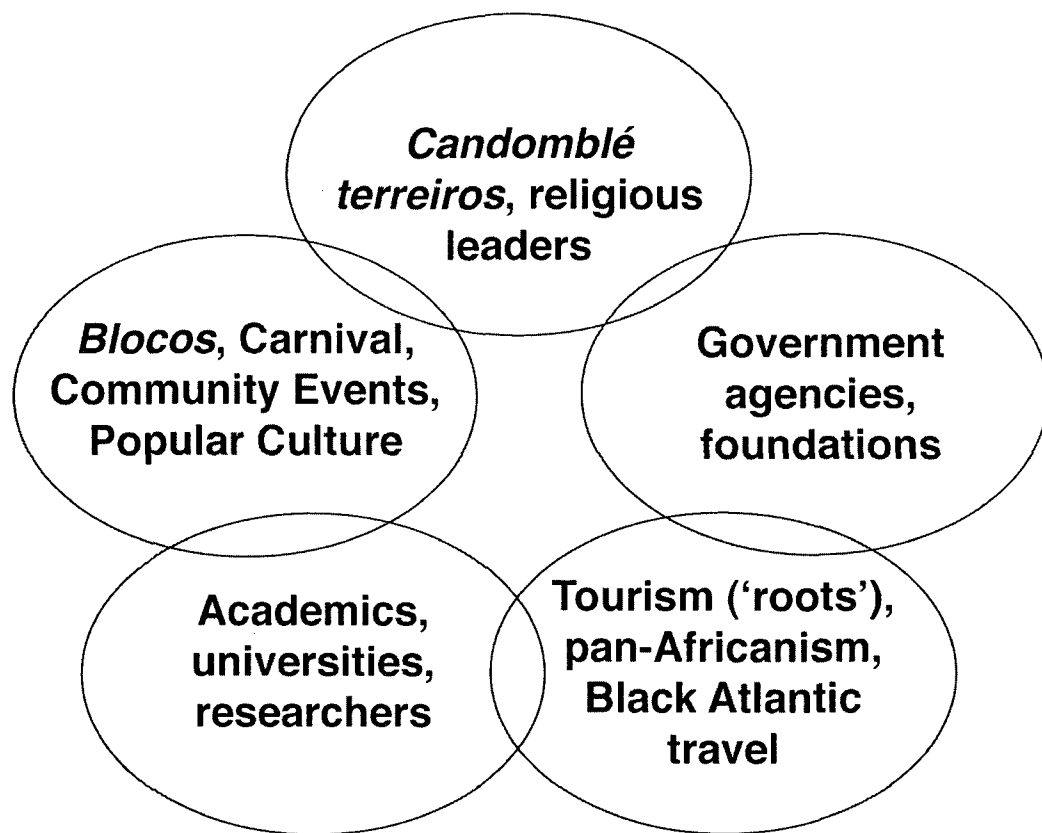


Figure 6.1 Principal spheres of influence in the definition of an 'Africanised' Black identity in Salvador.

The *blocos-afros*, like Ilê Aiyê and Olodum, along with their patrons in government and the academy, represent the popular or secular aspect of the

African-oriented approach to redefining Black identity in Bahia. But they cannot and should not be understood as independent operators. Most *blocos-afros* in Salvador, although engaged primarily in cultural and political mobilisation, stress the importance of the Afro-Brazilian religious traditions in the reconfiguration of the ethnic paradigm in Brazil—in Salvador this means, first and foremost, *Candomblé*.

The most famous and some of the oldest centres of Afro-Brazilian religious practice are to be found in Salvador. Many of these *terreiros*, such as Ilé Axé Opô Afonjá, are lavishly funded, have schools on the premises and *orixá* shrines that are large and ornate. Also, a number of these richer centres count amongst their members famous Brazilian and foreign celebrities, politicians, and even a number of academics—many of whom are anthropologists. Far from being loci for a subversive or hidden religion—what Lewis (1971) might call a ‘peripheral’ cult—centres such as Opô Afonjá have become cathedrals of Afro-Brazilian religion, the priests and leaders of which have become celebrities on the Salvador social scene. Importantly, *terreiros* such as Ilé Axé Opô Afonjá openly denounce syncretism and claim, like Valdina Pinto at Ilê Aiyê’s ‘Reconnecting with Africa’ event, to be more African than Africa. Towards this end, they do their best to eliminate or diminish Catholic or Christian elements of religious practice and to re-introduce instead elements that they believe to represent more authentically African (Yoruba) traditions.

Chief among the exponents of the re-Africanisation movement is the *mãe* or

íálorixá of Opô Afonjá. Maria Stella de Azevedo Santos, known as Mãe Stella de Oxóssi, is well known throughout Salvador as a vocal critic of Catholic syncretism in the *terreiro* and, despite the success and frequency with which she attracts rich patrons, the commercialisation of Afro-Brazilian religion in Salvador. She decries the regularised tours of *terreiros* in and around Pelourinho and the use of Yoruba images and slogans in public places. However, she has been very much responsible for the degree to which the Yoruba cultural vocabulary has permeated the popular consciousness of Salvador.



Figure 6.2 Two public expressions of 'Yorubanness' in Salvador: A bus company whose vehicles bear the company's name 'Axé'; one of the many large statues of the *orixás* that decorate the Dique de Tororo, a park near the city's football stadium.

During the era of military rule in Brazil, *terreiros* were secretive about their religious practices and about their membership. Today, association with a *terreiro* provides eminent public figures such as sports heroes, politicians, actors and musicians with a certain cache of authenticity and 'street credibility.' Images of the *orixás* are displayed prominently throughout the city and well-known words

and phrases from the liturgical canon of the *terreiro* such as 'Axé', which means 'positive energy' or 'power', are taken as brand names for everything from health tonics to major municipal bus lines to pop music produced in Salvador. In this way, *Candomblé* and Afro-Brazilian religion in general has been made mundane, part of the ordinary, and has lost much of the mystique and the aura of *feitiçaria* or witchcraft that surrounded it for much of the 20th century. This folklorisation, as Selka (2007) calls it, of *Candomblé* is of great concern to leaders like Stella and her adherents: "*Aqueles que vendem as tradições nossas, eles estão destruindo a herança da África em Salvador e no Brasil.*"³⁹ [Those who are selling our traditions, they are destroying the heritage of Africa in Salvador and in Brazil.]

The irony here is that many of those who object the loudest to the trivialisation and folklorisation of *Candomblé*, like Mãe Stella, are often the ones who have participated in making *Candomblé* more palatable to a wider Brazilian audience over the past twenty to thirty years. They have done this through a concerted campaign to place Yoruba cultural tropes at the centre of all aspects of Black culture *and* popular culture in Bahia and in doing so have gained widespread support from influential sectors of society in the process. By embracing the aid and patronage from diverse sources including the Palmares foundation, the culture and tourist ministries at both the state and federal levels, prominent figures like Gilberto Gil and fellow Baiano singer Caetano Veloso, and

³⁹ Interview with Maria, a former member of the Opô Afonja *terreiro* who has now left to start her own small *terreiro* in the neighbourhood of Brotas, Salvador, Bahia, Brazil, 25/09/05.

the academy at large, *terreiros* like Opô Afonjá, along with *blocos-afros* like Ilê Aiyê have sought to take, if not formal, then certainly symbolic and de-facto, control over who gets to speak not only for the Afro-Brazilian religious community, but for all Black people in Bahia. In repeated conversations with members of Olodum, Ilê Aiye, Casa Branca (another influential *terreiro*), and former members of Opô Afonjá, I invariably heard similar sentiments: that the Black movements in Bahia *needed* the *terreiros*, that without the strength and guidance of these religious spaces, the Black movements in Brazil would be dead.

In addition to Mãe Stella, one of the strongest voices for anti-syncretism is Deoscoredes M. Dos Santos or, as he is more commonly known, Mestre Didi, also of Opô Afonjá. Didi (2003) urges, in his work as a priest of the ancestor cult or *Egungun*, as an author and as a public speaker on Afro-Brazilian issues in Bahia, for members of *Candomblé* centres to abandon syncretic practices in favour of a particular Yoruba *orixá* or patron. Syncretic associations, he asserts, were made by the older generation and now that the *terreiro* has gained acceptance, practitioners should abandon such distortions. Didi and Stella also enjoy the support of Nigerian scholars such as Francis, the Yoruba teacher at UFBa, who often referred to them in our discussions as “representatives” of the Yoruba culture in Brazil. Both of them also regularly participate in world conferences of *orixá* worshippers that bring together devotees of *Candomblé*, *Umbanda*, *Santería* and native Yoruba from Nigeria for discussions of how

Yoruba 'culture' is being increasingly globalised.

For individuals like Stella, Didi and their devotees, anti-Syncretism and re-Africanisation is about asserting the authority of Black people in their own religious space—an African space that does not need to be sanctified or authorised by a Catholic priest. In discussions with members of one *terreiro* whose leaders had visited the cities of Lagos in Nigeria and of Ouidah in Benin, I was told:

*Nosso terreiro e outros, como Casa Branca...nossos líderes, eles conheçam África bem. Nossa mãe, ela visitava a África por muitos anos. Ela conheça políticos da Nigéria, chefes das vilas do loruba, até lorubanos famosos como Wande Abimbola—ele foi um professor do loruba em Nigéria e agora ele é o chefe do congresso mundial das lorubas...O que ela descobriu na África é que nossas tradições são mais puras, são mais autêntico, porque os escravos no Brasil, eles preservaram tudo! As tradições na África foram arruinadas pelos Britânicos...Você me pergunta sobre 're-Africanização' ou como você se chama, aqueles, os Africanos, têm que vir à Salvador a ser 're-Africanizado'!*⁴⁰

Our *terreiro* and others, like Casa Branca...our leaders, they know Africa well. Our *mãe*, she used to visit Africa for many years. She knows Nigerian politicians, chiefs of Yoruba villages, even famous Yorubas like Wande Abimbola—he's a professor of Yoruba in Nigeria and now he is the chief of the global congress of Yorubas...What she discovered in Africa is that our traditions are more pure, more authentic, because the slaves in Brazil preserved everything! The traditions in Africa were ruined by the British...You ask me about 're-Africanisation', or whatever you call it, Africans need to come to Salvador to be 're-Africanised'!

For this informant, the idea of re-Africanisation was not even relevant to her

⁴⁰ Interview with Maria in the neighbourhood of Brotas, Salvador, Bahia, Brazil, 12/11/2005. Maria asked for anonymity for her *terreiro*.

terreiro as she felt that her practices were more authentically African than those found in the Yoruba homeland. However, this has not stopped the leaders of many influential *terreiros* and *blocos-afros* from becoming a small, but growing part of a network of Black travellers engaged in what can be conceived of as 'pilgrimages' to the source of Africanity.

Dialogue on the West African Coast

In chapter 4, I explored the place of Black American tourists that visit Ghana and other West African sites as part of their quest to reorient themselves towards an African articulation of identity. During research conducted along the West African coast, I also encountered a small number of Brazilians in the port city of Ouidah, in Benin. These groups of Brazilians were composed of people from throughout the country, from Rio de Janeiro, São Paulo and one group composed entirely of individuals from Salvador. The group from Bahia was made up, primarily, of extremely affluent individuals—a number of them were of Lebanese-Brazilian⁴¹ descent, others openly referred to themselves as *Afro-Brasileiros*, and all of them self-identified as practitioners of *Candomblé*. They told me that they had come to West Africa for two reasons: for the Lebanese-Brazilians, they

⁴¹ Individuals of Lebanese descent make up an important segment of Brazilian society. The former mayor of São Paulo was Lebanese-Brazilian and Lebanese restaurants serving *cozinha árabe* can be found throughout the country—'kibbe', a popular Lebanese delicacy made of minced beef and bulgur wheat, can be found in street stalls from Manaus to Curitiba and is often considered a 'Brazilian' snack. The Lebanese population is also a major economic force on the West African coast. Most large hotels and hospitality establishments from Dakar to Lagos —many of which service the 'roots' tourism industry—are run by Lebanese businessmen that have resided in West Africa for generations.

wanted to visit family who managed a hotel in Lomé, Togo and, more importantly, they wanted to visit the place that their *íálorixá* had visited the year before. They explained to me that they had helped to pay for their *terreiro* leader to visit Lagos to take some courses in the Yoruba language and to learn a little about how the Yoruba themselves worshipped *orixás*:

Opô Afonjá and Casa Branca are attracting so many members in Salvador,' one of the group members told me near the 'Point of No-Return' monument in Ouidah, they've got so many rich patrons that our small *terreiro* is being left out. We can't do our work on anti-racism and empowering our community because Opô Afonjá takes the spotlight away. Plus, we are losing members to these larger *terreiros* that talk about Black power. That's why we are here. To understand more about Africa and take it back home to our religion.⁴²

There were a number of factors at work in the group dynamics of this small band of 'pilgrims.' I could not, throughout the interview, get the two younger Afro-Brazilian men in the party to really engage my questions. They seemed weary and uninterested, neither of them spoke French or English—whereas all of the group leaders were fluently multilingual—and one of them kept the headphones of his compact disc player turned to full volume throughout the interview. Whenever I asked them about their presence on the West African coast they typically deferred to one of the leaders of the group. All members claimed to be *candomblecistas*, but the two members of the purported Black constituency of the community had very little to say about their visit to West Africa. The leaders of

⁴² Interview with Emmanuel, Ouidah, Benin, 01/02/2003.

the group all spoke very eloquently about the need to rediscover the ancient African secrets of the Yoruba and Fon people of Benin who, according to one of the woman present, “were closely related to the Yoruba”⁴³ and about the need for Black communities in Brazil to reconnect with Africa. However, all of the group members, except for the two younger Black members, appeared to be moderately well to do—as do most Black American visitors to the forts of Cape Coast and Elmina.

Upon further questioning, I discovered that the two young men were children of a well-connected priestess at the group’s *terreiro* and that the group had paid for their round trip fares from Salvador to São Paulo to Johannesburg to Lagos so that they could return with a message about “true Africa” for the young people of the community. The group leaders were rich patrons and former residents of São Paulo where they practiced *Umbanda*. When they relocated to Salvador, they quickly became enthralled by what they told me was the “Africanness” of *Candomblé* and found it to be more “in-tune” with Brazil’s past than *Umbanda*—so they “converted”. *Umbanda* is another of Brazil’s African-derived religious traditions. It is practiced throughout the country, but enjoys prevalence in the industrialised Southeast states of São Paulo and Rio de Janeiro. *Umbanda*, like *Candomblé*, incorporates the religious pantheon of the Yoruba, but also gives equal weight, unlike *Candomblé*, to the spirits of

⁴³ Interview with Anna, Ouidah, Benin, 01/02/2003.

Amerindian warriors, *caboclos*, and the kindly, departed spirits of elders from the slave plantation, these are the old Blacks or *pretos velhos*. Additionally, *Umbanda* has integrated the ideas of European spiritism put forward in the mid-19th century by French religious innovator, Allan Kardec. *Umbanda* is often decried by religious purists in the *Candomblé terreiros* of Salvador because, they assert, its syncretic inclinations diminish and pollute the “proud traditions of the Yoruba in Brazil.”⁴⁴

I’m quite certain that Mãe Stella and Mestre Didi would be appalled by the kind of supermarket pick-and-mix approach to religion exhibited by these travellers—especially towards a religion that they sincerely believe provides them with a conduit to their ancestors and a venue for proudly asserting their Blackness separate from Christian symbols and European ideas such as syncretism. But in their attempts to exert power over what *Candomblé* is about or, rather, what they believe it *should* be about, they have been responsible for helping to diversify the religious marketplace so that opposing notions like ‘purity’ versus ‘syncretic’ have both become legitimate options for Paulista migrants to Salvador. Furthermore, they must surely accept that the positioning of a ‘purely African’ form of religious practice as a desirable avenue for Afro-Brazilians people to express their Blackness will— when connected with noble ideals, ministries of culture, carnival associations and noted celebrities—become

⁴⁴ Interview with Gregório, Salvador, Bahia, Brazil. 12/08/2005.

attractive to other elites within a society. Especially when that society has gone out of its way to emphasise and folklorise Blackness and Afro-Brazilian culture as some of the most important aspects of its heritage.

Stella and Didi emphasise anti-syncretism and deny that they even need to be re-Africanised. But here's the rub: they have, at the same time, succeeded in making these concepts an important part of the contemporary discourse on Black identity in Bahia to the extent that many *Candomblé terreiros* vie for members within their home communities based on whether or not they are more syncretic or more pure. Those that assert 'purity'—other than the large and well-funded *terreiros*—are forced to pull together whatever means they have at their disposal, including admitting rich patrons from São Paulo that have the funds to finance 'pilgrimages' to West Africa.

Parallel Debates

There is a clear parallel, I would suggest, between the syncretism versus African purity debate and the one that continues between academic partisans of the African survivals in American societies perspective and those who advocate the Mintz-Price model of rapid creolisation. Further, scholars in Bahia who support the changes in *Candomblé* practice being urged by Mestre Didi, Mãe Stella and others very often align themselves with the neo-Herskovitsian approach. The best example of this is Bahian historian Ubiratan Castro de Araújo (Castro de Araujo 1992, 1999, 2000, 2001, 2006), a former director of CEAO and

Fundação Cultural Palmares, who has written extensively on the need for the recognition and acceptance of Bahia's and Brazil's 'essential' Africanness and on the need for slave reparations. He is something of an intellectual godfather to many of Salvador's Black movements and is venerated throughout the city in *terreiros*, *blocos-afros* and community groups as a tireless advocate for these communities.

At a public discussion and Black community event held at a small community theatre on the relevance of Africa to Black societies in Brazil and entitled, quite simply, *África*, he spoke about his historical investigation into slave records, missionary accounts and colonial records on, specifically, patterns of scarification among rural slave communities. His research, apparently, suggests that African cultures were able to hold on to more than just scraps of religious activity and what Mintz and Price (1976) would term grammatical principles. Rather, he asserts the slave communities were able to hold on to African cultures *in toto*, including aspects of kinship, political authority, cosmologies and aesthetics. This is what he feels must be understood about the religious space of the *terreiro*: that they are contemporary concatenations of whole, 'pure' cultures of Africa, not some "schizophrenic"⁴⁵ amalgamation of Europe and Africa.⁴⁶

⁴⁵ Ubiratan Castro de Araujo speaking at the *África* seminar, Teatro Vila Velha, Salvador, Bahia, Brazil, 16/11/2005.

⁴⁶ *África* seminar, Teatro Vila Velha, Salvador, Bahia, Brazil, 16/11/2005.

In discussions with some of Castro de Araujo's students after the seminar, we talked about the strong connections that are maintained between academics in Salvador—particularly social scientists such as anthropologists and historians—and the *terreiros* and *blocos-afros*. I asked them whether the profound commitment that CEAO scholars and UFBa social science in general has towards the *terreiros* and the Black communities clouds their objectivity. Without exception, members of the group informed me that social science in Brazil has a history of being involved with the community. Even though most of them despise and reject the work of Freyre and the idea of racial democracy, one of them told me “you can't deny the power of his ideas—they have extended into every part of Brazilian life.” This is the legacy that many of these students want to inherit: an approach to social science that has a direct impact on the communities under study. The idea of social science research for curiosity's sake or purely for the notion of expanding human knowledge was, one of them offered, “*anti-social e antiquado*”⁴⁷ [antisocial and antiquated].

Furthermore, all of the students have adopted Castro de Araujo's dedication to demonstrating how much African practice still exists in Brazil, not just in the *terreiro*, but also throughout Brazilian society. The eldest student in the group, Nelson, who was born in the nearby town of Feira de Santana and who had come to study at UFBa with the assistance of a community-based scholarship

⁴⁷ Interview with Nelson, Marco, Paulinha and Denilson, Campo Grande, Salvador, Bahia, Brazil, 16/11/2005.

told me: “*A missão nossa, não é a encontrar pedacinhos das culturas Africanas, mas a ajudar a reconstruir uma cultura inteira que os Europeus não podiam destruir*” [Our mission is not to reconstruct little pieces of African cultures, but to help to reconstruct an entire culture that the Europeans couldn’t destroy].

Elite Status and Folkloric Blackness

Individuals that lead *terreiros* such as Opô Afonjá and *blocos-afros* such as Ilê Aiyê along with their academic interlocutors, like Castro de Araujo, are the elites of Salvador’s Black community. They enjoy celebrity status throughout the city, state and, quite often, the country and typically rub shoulders with the affluent and powerful of Brazilian society. These individuals certainly once inhabited the territory of the ‘sub-altern’, of the ‘marginalised’—as the constituents of the communities they claim to represent still do—but to suggest that they continue do so is to ignore the overwhelming influence that they assert on Bahian culture and on the communities they represent.

Let me be clear, Brazil is a country with a racism problem. Individuals who are visibly Black, those who are of Amerindian descent, or anyone who falls somewhere in between in the vast spectrum of colour that defines Brazilian racial categorisation will likely face far more challenges, economically and socially, than those Brazilians with fairer skin colour. Moreover, the discourse of Africanised identity and Black vindication articulated by the elites of Salvador explicitly takes on these challenges and seeks to free Black communities, like Curuzu-

Liberdade, from the oppression and hatred imposed by this racism—their goals and ideals are indeed noble. However, because the African-derived culture of Bahia and the Yorubacentric identities that these elites espouse have become mainstream, leaders like Stella have been transported out of the marginalised communities they once occupied to the level of celebrity. Not celebrity in the mode of a Sammy Davis, Jr. or a Louis Armstrong—famous Black talents that a mainstream white community can look upon, despite their often vocal opposition to racist practices in the entertainment industry, with fondness, familiarity or security. Rather, Stella, Vovô, Didi and Castro de Araujo articulate very public and very strident pro-Black and pro-African philosophies that have helped create a dominant cultural trope in Bahia. The majority of individuals in the communities they represent still live an impoverished life and must, on a daily basis, deal with the adversities of racism. Yet the elite status enjoyed by these luminaries is one that is founded on the folklorisation of exactly these challenges and some of the solutions they have developed to deal with them—folklorisation of what, in Brazil, amounts to forms of ‘social’ poverty and exclusion: Africanity, Blackness and actual economic poverty or disenfranchisement.

The gulf that exists in these communities between the elite leaders and the people they claim to represent was perhaps best represented, both figuratively and literally, during a musical concert held at a well-known landmark in Salvador, the Barra lighthouse or *Farol da Barra* in 2006.

Salvador sits at the tip of a triangular peninsula that juts southward into the

Atlantic. At the apex of this tip, guarding the mouth of the bay, sits the Barra lighthouse. Surrounding the lighthouse is a large green space overlooked by tall apartment buildings and casinos that line the city's famed Avenida Oceânica. In 2005, Minister of Culture Gilberto Gil organised what was supposed to be a musical extravaganza of African and Brazilian talent entitled Festival África-Brasil. The line-up included Olodum, Ilê Aiyê's band, Cesária Évora from Cape Verde, Brazilian jazz great Carlinhos Brown, popular Brazilian acts like Margareth Menezes and Daniella Mercury and, highlighting the festival, Miriam Makeba from South Africa. The event was very well funded, with many corporate sponsors including a large Brazilian Bank, a national mobile phone carrier, the federal and state governments and a major Brazilian construction company.

Although the park surrounding the *Farol* is large, the ground is sloped and can accommodate only about 7000 to 8000 people at best. However, despite these limitations, in the middle of the audience space, a raised VIP platform was erected for dignitaries and celebrities to view the event. Consequently, individuals from throughout the city had arrived only to find that unless they were within about fifty metres of the stage, their view would be obstructed by the VIP platform. I was unable to gain access to the guarded platform, but included in the list of invitees were prominent leaders and members of Opô Afonjá, Ilê Aiyê and other *blocos-afros* and *terreiros*, professors from UFBA involved in the Black movement, Francis the Yoruba teacher from CEAO, the honorary consul generals of Nigeria and Angola resident in Salvador, Gilberto Gil himself and a

cavalcade of local celebrities. While the majority of concertgoers were consuming R\$1 cans of beer carried around by sellers in polystyrene boxes, elevated four metres above the ground, the elite of the Bahia's Black cultural movement sipped wine, whiskies and champagne.

Now, I must reiterate here that I seek not here to question the good works and excellent community development programs that many of these groups support but rather the power and politics of the identity discourse they seek to mobilise. Both groups wield significant influence in their home neighbourhoods and are generally respected for their vociferous defence of Black people. However, both groups are actively engaged in trying to define 'what' should count as Blackness for Afro-Brazilians and what aspects of Black identity are most important if the members of this historically marginalised community in Brazilian society are to find a way forward.

There nonetheless appears to be, and this appearance is certainly solidified by events such as the one at the *Farol*, a considerable disconnect between elites such as Stella, Didi and even Francis, and the lives of the peoples they claim to champion. Now, there is nothing new or particularly noteworthy in the observation that those who achieve power and influence often find themselves removed from the people they fight for. What is of importance here is that these individuals have risen to prominence through the ironic folklorisation of the lifeways of a marginalised and—in most parts of Brazil—second-class social group. In this sense, the Africanised culture of Black people has become dominant and enjoys

primacy in Bahia, but the bearers of that culture—not including elites like Stella—remain a subservient class.

Chapter 7: Academic Inventions of Yoruba Religious Purity

As explored in chapter 2, the overriding narrative in the history of Africans in the Americas that has been handed down both to scholars and Black communities is the one first articulated by Herskovits and the network of Black researchers in Latin America and the Caribbean with whom he collaborated. In this tale, slaves separated by time and space from their African homelands were able—in spite of the brutality and cruelty of slavery—to ‘remember’ and hold on to their culture. Members of Ilê Aiyê, other *blocos-afros* like Ara Kétu and Olodum and *terreiros* in Salvador such as Casa Branca and Ilé Axé Opô Afonjá stridently assert that the culture they have maintained and thrived upon is the ancient, pure, Yoruba culture. Further, they maintain that this culture should take pride-of-place in any definition of what it means to be Black in Bahia.

Since the early work of Nina Rodrigues, Ramos and Freyre, Yoruba culture—both in and out of the *terreiro*—has taken centre stage in discussions of the African cultural repertoire of Bahia. Scholars have attempted to provide a number of reasons for why Yoruba cultural practices have been ascendant in the former slave societies of Brazil and elsewhere, such as Cuba:

Among the most successful were slaves in Bahia, Brazil, and their descendants, who, in the late twentieth century, practice what partisan observers call ‘purely African’ rituals and sing in what such observers call ‘perfect Yoruba.’ According to this narration of history, the descendants of the Yorùbá— members of the ‘Nagô,’ or

'Quêto,' nation—were so successful at preserving their primordial heritage that certain 'houses,' or temples, call themselves 'purely African' or 'purely Nagô.' ... Scholars have conventionally explained the success of the Brazilian Nagô nation in terms of an interaction among multiple factors...Authors have credited Yorùbá/Nagô success to various factors. First, the Brazilian scholar, Raymundo Nina Rodrigues and his followers offered the principal explanation that, at the time of the slave trade, the West African 'Nagôs' had possessed a more organized priesthood and a more highly evolved and therefore more complex mythology than had the other equally numerous African peoples taken to Brazil. (Matory 1999b:76)

Scholars such as Pierre Verger and Roger Bastide, have suggested that the reason why Yoruba culture is so prominent in Brazilian manifestations of Africanity is because of the more recent arrival of members of this society and because large numbers of this captive community were high ranking religious elites who were preoccupied with maintaining cultural distinctiveness from the existing slave population (Bastide 1971; Verger 2002). This perspective flows, it would seem, directly from Herskovits's assertion (1930, 1941) that the predominance of any particular African culture in any former slave region of the Americas was a direct result of the numerical superiority of the bearers of that particular culture. However, we cannot assume that this is necessarily what took place in Bahia and elsewhere. Most evidence seems to indicate that those who were enslaved and who arrived on American or Caribbean shores first generally had a greater impact on the generation of new identities and communities within the context of the plantation (Mintz and Price 1976).

For example, Phillip Morgan's 1998 *Slave Counterpoint*, a massive work which explores the development of slave-culture in North America demonstrates

that ethnic identities among the slave population, as per the Mintz-Price model, faded quite quickly. These distinct groupings were quickly replaced with a new creolised, plantation-specific sense of solidarity and, crucially, new slave arrivals were quickly assimilated into this collectivity, learning the ropes from the old creole hands (1998:460-461). Ira Berlin's *Many Thousands Gone: The First Two Centuries of Slavery in North America*, also published in 1998, similarly emphasises the importance of the original slave groups in the plantations for the formation of Black communities. Berlin describes differential patterns of slave arrival, creolisation, newcomer arrival, brief periods of re-Africanisation, and subsequent re-creolisation, but concludes that all of this inexorably led to the formation of new communities in which there was a general absence of an idea of 'Africa' and which prevented the intact "transfer of any single African nation or culture to the Americas" (1998:410).

Gwendolyn Midlo Hall (2005), although explicitly not in favour of the Mintz-Price model, has also shown that original slave communities, not newly arrived groups, ultimately exerted the most influence on the configuration of Black American societies in the southern United States. Further, Roquinaldo Ferreira (2007), focusing on microhistories of slaving interactions between particular regions of Brazil and Angola, suggests that Angolan ties with Brazil were as important as those forged with the Bight of Benin, and asserts that the majority of Africans imported into Brazil came, in fact, from Angola towards the end of the 19th century. Given these findings, the date of arrival of any so-called Yoruba

slaves in Brazil may not have had any relevance on the ethnic or cultural focus of the plantation society.

A recent development in the study of Afro-Brazilian culture and Black identity has looked at the impact that European, North American and white Brazilian intellectual elites had on the invention of 'Black' tradition in Brazil. Central to this body of inquiry is the assertion that so-called Africanisms in Brazil owe more to the influence of white Cultural elites and their efforts to replicate a pure form of Yoruba practice in the *terreiros* with which they had become associated, than to the agency of Black Brazilians and their enslaved ancestors. These so-called white 'negotiators' of Brazilian Blackness include Brazilian individuals such as Arthur Ramos and Edison Carneiro and American anthropologists such as Melville Herskovits and Ruth Landes.

Advocates of this position reject that the demographics of the slave plantation or that the regional microhistories of slavery had anything to do with the ascendance of one particular African culture over another and argue, instead, that the pre-eminence of Yoruba practice in the *terreiros* of Bahia and elsewhere in Brazil and the Atlantic world is a direct consequence of white fascination with Africanness. In this model, white and foreign elites attempted to make their chosen religious alternative—*Candomblé*— as authentic as possible and for them, authenticity implied Yorubanness. Proponents of this model—drawing on their experience with a state that now openly endorses the Africanness of Brazil in public manifestations of "*patrimônio negro*" in performing arts, musical festivals

like África-Brasil held in Salvador, *carnaval*, and tourism—assert that the emphasis placed on Yorubanness in the *terreiro* was brought about by European, North American and elite Brazilian scholars’ attempts to associate themselves with an alternative religious forms that they could modify and reorient towards what they understood to be high African religiosity and force the houses to shed any association with black magic (Brown 1999; Fry 1982; Hayes 2007).

Given the fervour with which the Brazilian state, NGOs, community development organisations, state-funded agencies like Fundação Cultural Palmares and Bahia’s hugely important tourism industry focus on celebrating Brazil’s African heritage, this position has clear merit. Indeed, whilst walking through almost any neighbourhood in Salvador, reading the Bahian newspapers or watching television, one is inundated with images and discussions of the importance of Brazil’s African past. This narrative generally follows the same ‘Yoruba-centric’ one found in the *terreiro*, in which African/Yoruba ‘culture’ best defines Black identity. Yet despite the proliferation of Yoruba oriented celebrations of Afro-Brazilian culture, the majority of Black Bahians outside of the space of the *terreiro* or *bloco-afro* rarely participate in these expressions of ‘Brazilian’ culture in any capacity other than bus driver, tour guide, dancer or performer. To be sure, these symbols of Yoruba oriented Blackness are pervasive but are, for the most part, managed and maintained by the elite of Brazilian society.

Matory calls this position “wrongly posited” in that it depends “on the

powerlessness of all Blacks over every part of their lives” and argues that “a more carefully drawn history will...reveal the role of Afro-Brazilians in creating a trans-Atlantic culture, with consequences no less revolutionary in Africa than in Brazil” (1999b:79). He argues, along with Palmié (2007) and others (Clarke 2002), that Black societies throughout the Americas have not only been responsible for reinventing and incorporating ‘Africanisms’ into their religious practice and identity discourse but have also influenced, in some respects, the formation of some forms of ethnic identity in West Africa.

In Matory’s model of Yoruba ethnogenesis, an active dialogue between the northeastern littoral of Brazil and the West African coast resulted not only in an emphasis on Yoruba purity in the Afro-Brazilian religious congregations of Bahia but also in the consolidation of the unified Yoruba ethnic group itself. He asserts that “Afro-Brazilian talk and action helped to generate a so-called Yoruba culture in West Africa that is in fact younger than its Brazilian diaspora” (Matory 1999b:81). Matory’s intent here is to counter claims of Euro-Brazilian agency in the creation of Yoruba purity in Bahia with a model in which a class of literate and well-travelled Black Brazilians employed in trans-Atlantic travel and trade helped to bring ideas about a pure Yoruba culture and Yoruba traditional religion *from* Brazil *to* West Africa and thus brought the same into existence in and around Lagos.

The first appearance of this model was in the article *The English Professors of Brazil* (Matory 1999b). Here, the author presents a reconstructed version of the

origin of the Yoruba people, one that focuses on the period called the Lagosian Cultural Renaissance of the 1890s. Matory asserts that during this transformative epoch, the Yoruba came to be unified as a bounded ethnic group, celebrated both in West Africa and in the Atlantic world as a powerful and politically complex kingdom. The thesis is premised on the assumptions that, before the 19th century, the unified Yoruba kingdom as we know it today did not exist and that, secondly, there was nothing like a pure or unified culture or religion that spanned all of Yorubaland. Matory's assertion is that a transnational movement of the Bahian emphasis on the 'purity' of the Nagô form of *Candomblé* found in many of the oldest *terreiros* of Salvador like Opô Afonjá to the Lagosian coast during the 19th century was instrumental in solidifying and unifying the widespread speakers of the different Yoruba dialects in the southwest and central parts of what is now Nigeria into an organised kingdom.

Until the 19th century, the southwestern area of what is now Nigeria contained a number of chiefdoms whom the Hausa and other northern Islamised populations referred to generically by the term "Yarriba", the most prosperous and largest of these being the Òyó (Clapperton 1829; Matory 2005:51). The Òyó controlled a large area of the savannah between the coast and the Sahel and were important negotiators of trade between the trans-Saharan societies and the coast (Matory 2005:51). The smaller chiefdoms that the Òyó dominated came to speak languages not dissimilar from Òyó, or 'proto-Yoruba', and to adopt aspects of Òyó ritual and mythology—Òyó gods started to become everyone's gods

(Apter 1992b). However, with the decline of Òyó in the late 18th century and the rise of the paramount chiefdom of Dahomey, members of this now fallen society along with those they had assimilated and converted—including the Ègbá, Ègbádo, Ilésa and Nàgó—became subject to the slaving predations of their newly ascendant neighbours. Dahomey, whom Chatwin called “a Black Sparta between the Yoruba tribes of present day Nigeria and the Ewe tribes of Togo” (1998:9), became major African slavers and their captives were shipped to the Americas from the ports of Lagos, Porto-Novo and Ouidah.

Lagos became one of the most important and influential of these slaving ports and many traders grew independent of the influence of Dahomey (Aderibigbe 1975; Matory 2005:52). The various groups who reached Brazil from Lagos in the 18th and 19th centuries came to be collectively known as the Nagô. Slowly at first, but then reaching a peak after 1835 after the largest slave insurrection ever in Brazil and continuing through 1842 (Reis 2003), large numbers of this Nagô group made their way back to Lagos through employment with trans-Atlantic merchants or through deportation. Further, after the 1835 revolt officials in Bahia made a regular practice of shipping troublesome slave groups to Lagos. Consequently, this encouraged other manumitted Africans in Bahia to even go so far as to charter ships to carry whole communities of former slaves—many of them Brazilian born—‘back’ to the growing metropolis of Lagos (Verger 2002) and to other cities along the coast including Ouidah and Porto Novo (Babalola Yai 1997) and also Accra (Amos and Ayesu 2002). By 1889,

“one in seven Lagosians had lived in Cuba or Brazil” (Matory 2005:53).

Also crucial to Matory’s argument was the return of the Aku from Sierra Leone back to colonial Lagos. The Aku were people of essentially proto-Yoruba origin from the area around the Lagosian lowlands who were sold into slavery and subsequently freed by the British Royal Navy into the urban environment of Freetown. From the 19th century onwards, the British West African naval patrol captured large numbers of slave ships headed for the Americas and then resettled the liberated slaves in the Sierra Leonean port city—their descendents came to be known as the Krios. Composed primarily of Òyó, Ègbá, Ègbádo, Ilésá and Nàgó groups living in close proximity, this segment of the city’s population were taken in by British missionaries, converted to Christianity and made literate. According to Matory (2005:53), this cheek-by-jowl existence made them more cognisant of their similarities and shared difference from the other, indigenous, West African populations—in a foreign land, amidst a population thrown together by circumstance, a united Yoruba identity developed far away from its Nigerian homeland.

As this new community coalesced, large numbers started to make the eastward journey back ‘home’ to Lagos and by 1880, the number of Aku—now called Sàrós—in Lagos “roughly equalled the number of Afro-Latin returnees” (Matory 2005:54). These literate newcomers rapidly found success in British appointed administrative positions and in the commercial sector where their English proficiency and Anglican religion gave them an advantage. Most

importantly, Sàró priests and ministers started to preach and translate the bible in a language that all members of the community could understand—the Aku language of their exile in Sierra Leone which now came to be known “by a term previously used only by outsiders and reserved for the Òyó—that is, Yoruba.” (Matory 2005:54)

This florescence of new ideas about group identity, the growth of a Yoruba literary canon that included not only the bible but also a transliteration of the Yoruba founding myths, and the success of returnee Sàrós made Lagos the new capital of a consolidated Yoruba ethnic group that many British colonialists, Matory argues (2005:55), saw as superior to other African societies. Here, Matory cites the former governor of Lagos, Alfred Moloney, who commended groups of returnee Afro-Latin ‘Yorubas’ for having kept their dignified and ancient ‘Yoruba’ language alive in Cuba and Brazil (2005:55).

Upon their return to Lagos these ‘returnees’ helped to stimulate what Matory calls the Lagosian Cultural Renaissance within which ideas of Yoruba superiority and cultural unity were initially generated. Freed Brazilian slaves who had been hired by traders and merchants then communicated these ideas, along with an emphasis on the importance of learning the English language, back across the Atlantic into the *Candomblé* houses and Black communities like Curuzu-Liberdade. Chief among such agents or vectors (as Matory styles them) of such Yorubanness is Martiniano Eliseu do Bonfim, whom Matory describes as one of Bahia’s “towering leaders and perennial informants quoted in the literature on

Afro-Bahians from the 1890s to the 1940s”—he was one of Matory’s so-called “English professors” of Brazil (2005:46; see also Palmié 2007).

According to Matory, such “professors of English” deliberately explored and exploited their connections within the Lagosian Renaissance and other cosmopolitan affiliations and returned to Brazil with ideas about the ascendance of a growing Yoruba culture. Subsequently, ideas about the purity and superiority of the Nagô tradition flourished and were distilled in Brazilian communities and then re-imported back to Africa to help refine and solidify a unified Yoruba kingdom (Matory 2005).

Now, there appears to be no doubt that individuals like Bonfim and others, such as Nina Rodrigues’s friend Lourenço Cardoso, another Afro-Brazilian traveller who translated works from English to Yoruba, were instrumental in negotiating and solidifying a sense of Yoruba purity on both sides of the Atlantic. I place the Yoruba literary critic Wande Abimbola, whom more than a few informants that I spoke to in connection with anti-syncretism were familiar with, in the same group, along with Olabiyi Babalola Yai. Indeed, Abimbola, a former professor and vice-chancellor of the University of Ile-Ife, a *babaláwo* diviner, and an important member of the global *orixá* movement, has been called a “new Martiniano” by Matory (2001:187). To this company one must add Francis, the Yoruba teacher at UFBa, and the score or so of other Nigerians and West Africans living and working in Salvador, engaged in reprocessing and—to use a

metaphor suggested by Palmié—‘cooking’⁴⁸ ideas of Africa and Yorubanness for the appetites of Black communities in Bahia.

But to suggest, as Matory does, that it was the labours of these Black identity entrepreneurs alone who brought about the emphasis on ‘Yorubanness’ in the *terreiros* of Bahia and ultimately in the neighbourhoods, community groups and *carnaval* associations is to neglect the fact that many of these individuals actively *used* anthropologists and other social scientists—both Brazilian and American—in bringing about this focus on purity. Bonfim actively engaged anthropologists such as Ruth Landes (1947) and Edison Carneiro (1948) essentially as press agents for his quest to elevate his *terreiro*—Opô Afonjá—and its leader at the time, Mae Aninha, to the status of being the *only* Afro-Brazilian religious congregation that could speak with authority about Africa. To be sure, there is agency here and Black agency at that, but slowly the anthropologist also becomes implicated in the process of remaking Africa for Brazil. In this sense, both Matory and those who suggest that white intellectuals created the emphasis on Yorubanness in the *terreiro* are right, for one could not exist—in the context of a Brazil committed to the use of social science as a source of legitimisation for nation building—without the other.

⁴⁸ Discussant comments by Stephan Palmié at the 2007 Meeting of the Society for the Anthropology of Religion, April 13-16, Phoenix, Arizona for the panel *African Diasporic Religions: Tradition, Modernity and Post-Modernity*. The improvised kind of ‘cooking’ of cultural symbols and ideas that Palmié suggests would appear to be indebted, at least nominally, from one of Palmié own intellectual antecedents in the area of Cuban Black studies: Fernando Ortiz and the notion of a *ajiaco cultural* or cultural stew.

'Respected' scholars like Ramos and Nina Rodrigues along with anthropologist-activists like Landes and Carneiro provided the 'pure' *terreiros* with an opportunity for their practice and devotion to championing Black communities in Bahia to be tolerated by mainstream Bahian and the more broadly Brazilian society. *Négociants* of Africanity like Bonfim were very much responsible for helping bring about the emphasis on Yoruba purity in many of Salvador's Blackest neighbourhoods, but individuals like Landes, Carneiro, Ramos and later, Pierre Verger and Roger Bastide, helped legitimate this emphasis during the course of 20th century Brazil. Moreover, in his 2005 synthesis of this argument, *Black Atlantic Religion*, Matory appears to reverse himself somewhat by admitting exactly this point in the same volume in which he stridently, and quite rightly, reminds us of the importance of local Black agency.

In a chapter of this volume entitled *Para Inglês Ver: Sex, Secrecy and Scholarship in the Yoruba-Atlantic World*, Matory (2005:188-223) argues that Landes, guided by a feminist perspective, was single-handedly responsible for transforming Bahian *Candomblé* into a religion governed primarily by a matriarchy of powerful women priests. Further, Matory (2005:189-195) suggests it was Landes herself who recapitulated, backwards in time, the 'cult matriarchy' of *Candomblé* so that practitioners began to see the matriarchal form as the truly 'African form'—here he also asserts that Landes also brought about the construction of male *adé* priests as homosexuals within the space of the *terreiro*. Yet, this point is argued on slim evidence and Matory falls into the very same trap

for which he criticizes Fry, Motta, Wafer and others: privileging his analysis to a few extremely famous and influential *Candomblé terreiros* and to informants who are part of the elite of the Afro-Brazilian religious leadership in Salvador.

Black Atlantic Religion is a praise song for ‘pure’ Yoruba-form *Candomblé*. It places this form over all others and regards syncretism as a step backwards for Black identity. Matory seems to be a victim of his own analysis: he dismisses the extremely popular Afro-Brazilian practice, *Umbanda*, which is found in Brazil’s southeast and Amazonian delta regions and brings together Yoruba deities with Amerindian entities, Catholic saints and European spiritism in an eclectic—and largely urban—religious fusion, as a “watered-down” version of *Candomblé* (2005:165).⁴⁹ While writing eloquently about how foreign intellectual elites played no role in elevating Yoruba practice to the exalted level it now enjoys in Black Bahian society, he is himself engaged in this very activity.

The point here is that academics, especially anthropologists, have been and continue to be vitally important in manufacturing and disseminating much of the mystique of the *terreiro*. Not just in the rarefied atmosphere of the academy but also within the societies they study. Palmié (1995), in his study of Fernando

⁴⁹ There is an irony here, in that, from the perspective of an Africanist, *Umbanda* appears, in many ways, to be ontologically and epistemologically more ‘African.’ Although *Candomblé*—especially Mãe Stella’s and Mestre Didi’s so-called pure Nagô form—claims to be more authentically African in practice and in belief, its rigidity and emphasis on what they perceive as strict Yoruba dogma very much goes against the kind of flexible and dynamic nature found in many West African religious traditions. In its cultural permeability and heteroglossy of voices, *Umbanda*, it can be argued, is the more African form. Purity, as a concept, is anathema to most West African religious traditions.

Ortiz's nation building project in Cuba has shown how informants and research participants are quick to start incorporating and manipulating anthropological ideas and concepts into their own political, economic and social agendas. Black communities in Bahia have been equally successful in utilising the anthropological fixation with the Afro-American *problématique*—in particular, Afro-Brazilian religious survivals and how to 'explain' them—into their own projects of social mobilisation and cultural legitimisation.

Scholars on both sides of the debate concerning the historical origins of Africanity and Yorubanness in the diaspora—Africa-centric historians versus creole theorists—seek to emphasise the place of local Black agency in the maintenance and preservation or the invention of African traditions in Brazil as a corrective to interpretations that place the 'creation' of Africa in Brazil and elsewhere at the feet of Herskovits and his followers. However, whilst down amongst the ethnographic 'weeds', so to speak, it is extremely difficult to deny the looming presence that many of these early social scientists still possess—many leaders in the Black community of Bahia still invoke the legacy of these 'white' negotiators of the 'Black Atlantic. Individuals such as Ruth Landes and Pierre Verger and their affluent Brazilian interlocutors are often mentioned or talked about with considerable frequency in Salvador. I speak here not just of elites in the *terreiros* like Opô Afonjá or in *blocos* like Ilê Aiyê, but of young men playing football on a small plaza in Curuzu-Liberdade; of women working in restaurants close to the large *terreiro* of Casa Branca in the neighbourhood of

Engenho Velho; or of schoolchildren visiting the old quarter of Salvador, Pelourinho—everyday people whose familiarity with ethnographers and ethnography is often surprising, to say the least.

I recount here an interaction with just such a group of schoolchildren that had just emerged from an art gallery in Pelourinho, on their way to see a performance of Olodum. The gallery they were visiting is part of the Fundação Pierre Verger. An organisation whose purpose, according to its website, is to “improve the exposure of the ethno-photographer's work” that is based on, in Verger own words, his “love for two places: Bahia and the region of Africa located within the Gulf of Benin. The Foundation's purpose is to enhance this shared heritage by revealing to Bahia the knowledge I have of Benin and Nigeria and by informing those two countries of their cultural influence on Bahia” (Fundação Pierre Verger 2007).

The presence of the Verger foundation can be seen everywhere in Salvador. From museum openings, to Black consciousness events, to *terreiro* celebrations, it is a powerful and ubiquitous cultural force. In addition, the foundation also makes money by selling artwork, photo books and tee shirts emblazoned with the photographer's images. All of the images used on the shirts are of Black Brazilian men and women engaged in work or in after-work relaxation or are of African men, women or children, shot in stark settings and always rendered in black-and-white. There is no interpretive or ethnographic material attached to the images printed on the tee shirts and they definitely

appear to be the most popular item for sale in the gallery/boutique—they have become quite a common site throughout Salvador.

Upon emerging from the gallery, a number of the students were grasping recently purchased tee-shirts or had already put them on, so I asked them about what had just transpired and why they bought the shirts at the boutique.

AD: Why did you buy these shirts?⁵⁰

Informant: Pierre Verger is very important. He helped teach many people in Salvador about Africa, about why people in the *terreiro* do all that crazy stuff. The spinning, and the singing and everything.

AD: So, he taught Baianos about Africa?

Informant: Exactly! He showed the *Candomblés* what part of Africa their rituals come from. They are from Nigeria. You have two kinds. The Jeje and the Yoruba. He showed them the difference. Well, I think my teacher goes to a *terreiro*. But I'm not sure. I don't think he would tell us. But it is important to help support the Pierre Verger foundation because he did so much for Baianos. Especially for us 'Afro-Brasileiros'.

AD: OK, so you bought the tee-shirts because of Verger.

Informant: Yes, but also because of the Africans on them. We're all Black—Africans and Brazilians and we have many things in common. So I wear this because it is chic but also because I like to show Black beauty. You see the scars on this girl's face? Well, I would never do that, but this is what it means to be beautiful in Africa!

AD: Do you think that scars like these [I point to the shirt] are common in Africa?

⁵⁰ Interview with schoolchildren outside Galeria Pierre Verger, Pelourinho, Salvador, Bahia, Brazil, December 2005. Conversation format of this interview does not facilitate presentation of original Portuguese.

Informant: That is what they do throughout Africa. Especially in Nigeria. I saw it on Fantástico.



Figure 7.1 Tee-shirts and photo books displaying images of Blackness for sale at the Pierre Verger gallery-boutique in Pelourinho.

This exchange left me thinking about the extent to which figures like Verger still penetrated the everyday discourse of Baianos in Salvador about race and identity. Further, I became concerned with the extent to which awareness that scholars like Verger had been involved in the construction of Black identity permeated the general public in Salvador.

Verger is perhaps the most oft-cited member of the cadre of foreign intellectuals responsible for popularising and romanticising the space of the *terreiro* in Bahia. He was born in Paris in 1902 and during the years just prior to

and until the end of the Second World War Verger travelled the world making a living primarily as a photographer. As his fame in France grew, he became very much involved with the Musée d'Ethnographie du Trocadero in Paris and started to orient his photographic work towards the exotic and anthropological—two domains that are often not mutually exclusive. He arrived in Bahia in 1946 and focused on photographing Black men and women. While in Bahia, he began writing about Black Brazil and its 'African' sources, suggesting that *Candomblé* is the source of all of Afro-Brazil's rich and vibrant culture. Upon this 'revelation', Verger decided to travel to West Africa.

In Africa, Pierre Verger claims he was "reborn", receiving the name of 'Fatumbi', which means 'one who was reborn for Ifá' and declares—though this is disputed by some of my informants in West Africa—that he was indoctrinated as a *babalaô*, or diviner of Ifá prophecies, and so became privy to the deepest esoteric knowledge of the Yoruba tradition. It is also at this time that he started his career as an 'anthropologist' and as a historian, publishing a number of works on Yoruba religious practice throughout the Americas and Caribbean and also on the Atlantic slave trade (Verger 1954, 1964, 2002).

In every bookstore in Salvador, Pierre Verger's books, especially *Fluxo e refluxo do Trafico de Escravos entre o Golfo do Benin e a Bahia de Todos os Santos dos Séculos XVII a XIX* (2002), are available for sale. Bookstore employees informed me that they always have to restock Verger's titles on a monthly basis and that they are regularly reprinted in Brazil by the large

Salvador-based publisher, Corrupio. At every event I attended that promoted Black consciousness, awareness of African heritage, religious tolerance and anti-racism, Pierre Verger's name was always, without fail, invoked by important speakers or organisers. At an event promoted by UFBa and organised by a religious tolerance community group, one prominent Black leader who is a member of a small, but "proudly Yoruba" *terreiro*, proclaimed: "*Pierre 'Fatumbi' Verger era o meu babalaô, e ele me ensinou tudo sobre os Orixás*" [Pierre 'Fatumbi' Verger was my babalaô and he taught me everything about the Orixás]⁵¹. This individual spoke expressively and passionately about the importance of Black society finding its own way in Brazil and of Black people in Brazil being proud of their African heritage. However, he sanctioned and authenticated his place in the Afro-Brazilian religious hierarchy of Bahia not through a visit he had recently made to West Africa, nor through knowledge of the Yoruba language, but rather through a connection with a French amateur anthropologist and photographer whose principal legacy in Bahia is a foundation and gallery that earns money through the sale of photographic representations of Blackness and tee-shirts.

In the suburb of Lauro de Freitas, a former student and member of Verger's entourage who is also a *babalaô*, Balbino Daniel de Paula, founded the *terreiro* Ilê Axé Opô Aganjú in 1972. Balbino is something of a minor celebrity in Salvador

⁵¹ ErêGege (Espaço de Reflexão Étnica e de Gênero) Religious tolerance seminar, Salvador, Bahia, Brazil, 08/10/04.

and often speaks at major events in the city that are connected with the Black movements and with religious tolerance. His is an extremely well known and popular *terreiro* that counts amongst its devotees a number of important politicians and businessmen. Balbino regularly speaks about the need for greater religious tolerance in Bahia and in all of Brazil, especially given the increasing strength and power wielded by the large evangelical churches, many of which are openly hostile to the *terreiros*. He is, along with Mãe Stella and Mestre Didi, one of the most famous and influential protagonists of Africanity in Bahia.

At a recent event commemorating the institution of a new law aimed at protecting all religious spaces from any form of discrimination, Balbino declared, in the presence of a number of visiting state dignitaries, local governmental officials, and visitors from Nigeria, including Francis, that none of this would have been possible were it not for the initial support and encouragement that he received from Verger.⁵² Dead now for over a decade, Verger's name is still everywhere in Salvador: in daily newspapers, on schools that bear his name, on television, and in connection with many aspects of the Black movement. With this kind of daily bombardment, it is unsurprising to find that even among lay people and school children, the name 'Verger' has become synonymous with 'Africa', 'Blackness', 'Yoruba' and '*orixá*'.

⁵² Patrimônio da Bahia event at Ilê Axé Opô Aganju, Lauro de Freitas, Bahia, Brazil, November, 2005.



Figure 7.2 Image captures from the opening sequence of the movie *Cidade das Mulheres* [City of Women] (2005) with images of Ruth Landes and her voyage from the United States to Brazil to conduct fieldwork featured prominently. Reproduced under Fair Use copyright.

Verger is not alone. Almost as popular is the name of Ruth Landes. Though professionally blackballed in the United States by Herskovits with the assistance of Ramos (Yelvington 2006b), Landes legacy is still quite potent in Bahia. Landes has come to be something of an unofficial icon of feminine power in the *terreiros* that claim to practice a pure Yoruba form, and she is exalted as the one who finally “showed the world”⁵³ a society where women were in control and where the “feminine communed directly with the divine”⁵⁴.

⁵³ Interview with G.C.N, a former part-time teacher at Escola Ilê Aiyê, Salvador, Bahia, Brazil, October, 2004.

⁵⁴ Interview with Aninha, member of *terreiro* Casa Branca, Salvador, Bahia, Brazil, December, 2005.

In a recent film entitled *Cidade das Mulheres* (2005), that takes its name from Landes' (1947) similarly titled *City of Women*, the American anthropologist is lauded and celebrated as a woman who truly understood the feminine soul of Black Brazil and also of African society. Indeed, the film proudly proclaims itself as a homage to Landes and to the other proud women of Salvador. Funded by the Brazilian national oil company, Petrobras, the Government of Bahia, and the Federal Government's Culture Ministry [again, Gilberto Gil's portfolio], the film was written and produced by Cléo Martins, a well-known minor celebrity in Salvador, a close associate of Mãe Stella, and a devotee of Opô Afonjá—the *terreiro* that Matory (2001) singles out as the mostly purely Yoruba house of worship in all of Brazil. Consequently, the message of Yoruba purity comes through loud and clear.

Shortly after I found a copy of this movie for sale at a bootleg DVD seller near the Salvador airport for the equivalent of \$2 US, I soon discovered that it is often shown at the Ilê Aiyê after-school programs and also in Opô Afonjá educational initiatives. This provided me with an explanation for how, when informing a group of small children outside Ilê Aiyê that I was an '*antropólogo*', one of them was able to shout back at me "*como Ruth Landes!*" Subsequently, I also found that the DVD is widely available at magazine stands throughout the city, and is available for download on the Internet. Not to mention that the same booksellers who carry this DVD also do a brisk trade in Verger's 'ethnography.' This is not a movie made for specialists nor for screening in introductory

anthropology courses, but rather was made for broad consumption in Salvador.

I mention the sources of funding to demonstrate how the message of Africanity and African purity are increasingly being seen as mainstream in Bahia. Petrobras, essentially an organ of the Brazilian government, is one of the largest philanthropic organisations in Brazil. They regularly fund films, television, concerts and other 'cultural' projects throughout the country and are often connected with overt public manifestations of Brazilian nationalism. For them to be openly associated with a film that presents a racial and historical narrative that runs contrary to the dominant ideals of racial democracy marks a shift, albeit a small one, in the public image of the company. In 1984, an application was made by a unified coalition of Brazil's Black movements to the oil giant for funding to support the Zumbi movement. Petrobras declined the application, as Zumbi was seen as too divisive and did not represent 'racial democracy' (Burdick 1998a:71). Twenty years later, and Petrobras appears to be more than willing to fund a project that speaks to a racial agenda very different from the harmonious ideal they previously espoused.

Cidade das Mulheres opens with a series of animated sequences that place images of Ruth Landes amongst shots of Black Brazilian women carrying water, cooking or engaged in religious activity. Intercut with these images are scenes of Asante women in Ghana wearing *kente*, Edison Carneiro walking the streets of Salvador and an image of the statue of liberty—indicating Landes' home in New York. This opening sequence then fades into a shot of an actress portraying

Landes 'writing up' her fieldnotes on an old typewriter with a narrator, speaking in Landes' voice, quoting from *City of Women*. The film, rather than echoing Matory's suggestion that Landes created the emphasis on femininity and homosexuality, suggests rather that Landes uncovered this basic 'truth' of African societies. Either way, it becomes clear that Landes, and now Matory, are both implicated in the ways in which groups like the Yorubacentric *terreiros* and other similarly influential community groups understand and represent themselves to the society-at-large.

Ethnography and Identity

From Herskovits to Landes, Freyre to Ramos, Verger to Bastide, these so-called white inventors of Brazilian 'Africanness', although not entirely responsible, as Fry (1982) suggests, for inventing ideas of Yoruba purity or Africanity in Black Bahian society, cannot be ignored or omitted from an analysis of the construction of Africa-centric and Yoruba-centric identities in Bahia. These individuals remain as powerful touchstones for local Black communities and are used to legitimate ideas of Africanness. Even when speaking to members of militant groups and active Black organisers, prominent leaders cannot help but invoke the names of these researchers in order to lend some degree of anthropological credibility to their claims of African descent—I've even heard the name Matory uttered at public events on a number of occasions.

The continuing reliance on individuals whose ideas and theories, in the

annals of academic social science, may have been all but forgotten or rejected reminds the anthropologist that, as much as we are involved in the describing and ethnographically inscribing societies, we often get implicated in new ethnographic realities, born of ideas such as identity, purity, syncretism and creolisation. Surely, this is as much a dialogue, one that is transacted between the authors and those communities who read and consume ethnography, as the one that Cilfford (1986) insists is embedded on the page.

Ethnography is consumed by both those for whom it is written and consumed by those about whom it is written. As Sidney Mintz notes, Afro-American cultures were born in the midst of incredible brutality and oppression, born of “disturbed pasts” (1974) and delivered to a future of racism and intolerance. In using the work, ideas and names of these researchers we see an attempt, on the part of those who invoke them, to infuse these pasts with meaning.

Landes, Verger and even Matory fit, in many ways, the prototype of the unabashedly romantic anthropologist. It is an image that anybody who has spent an afternoon moving from lecture hall to lecture hall at a large conference, such as the American Anthropological Association, is only too familiar with and one that Handler describes beautifully:

The romantic anthropologist buys into the ethnic self-definition of the people he studies...the anthropologist returns from ‘the field’ with many native artefacts. These have been chosen with the expert’s eye. The anthropologist does not buy cheap tourist art, but

knows instead how to choose the truly authentic pieces that tourists will neither discover nor understand. This anthropologist is a connoisseur of commodified ethnicity. (1993:74)

Yet these self-same anthropologists often appear stunned to discover that their work is often consumed and reprocessed by the very people about whom it is written to create new social realities. The elites of Afro-Brazilian society in Bahia are so intimately familiar with the process of ethnography, with the debates present in the history of Afro-American societies and with the work of major anthropologists working their terrain, that one is almost reticent to self-identify as a member of this most peculiar tribe. “Another one?” is a phrase I received more than a few times—Salvador is, quite literally, lousy with anthropologists and ethnologists, many of them working and reworking the same well-trodden ground.

There is, of course, nothing wrong with this. If anthropology is indeed a social *science*, then repetition and confirmation of past research with fresh eyes and fresh ideas is a pre-requisite for this discipline’s validity. But should it then come as any surprise when anthropologists and their work start to be incorporated into local histories and agendas?

Matory’s work in this regard seems to present a particularly convoluted set of, essentially, dialogic relationships. He is at pains to distance himself from those scholars who seek to deny agency to Black travellers like Bonfim and their role in creating Yoruba identity in Brazil; he then goes on to single out Landes as the one anthropologist who *did* invent an idea of what Africa meant in the Americas; now, in an ironic turnaround that can only be compared to some kind

of M.C. Escher painting, his work is being used by local communities to reject the idea of white invention while at the same used to bolster the place of Ruth Landes. As one local historian in Salvador told me:

Academics think they operate in a vacuum and you anthropologists are the worst. Listen, I've read Matory, he worked at Opô Afonjá, knows Mãe Stella very well. Go into that place right now and they'll give you a copy of the *English Professors* article if you ask for it-in ENGLISH! These are smart people. You think they are not going to turn around and start using his findings to justify their stances right away. We may be Black, but we know how to read!⁵⁵

Clifford (1986:118) argues that what frequently passes for the local or native's perspective in ethnography is, more often than not, only the beliefs, ideas and assertions of the anthropologist who, in the act of inscribing culture, serves to suppress the native's worldview. Writing ethnography becomes, therefore, an expression of power and control and provides, ultimately, authority to speak for the native. On the other hand, what happens when both the work and the personality of the anthropologist become a primary resource for mobilizing, legitimating and manipulating communities? What happens when the labour of ethnography is subsumed by activism, romanticism and ego? Clifford called for ethnography to be dialogic and polyphonic, to be an anthropology of the present (Fox 1991:7), but what happens when, as part of this dialogue, local communities—the object of our study—take one 'version' of their story as gospel and run with it?

⁵⁵ Interview with Norberto Wanderley, a local amateur historian who resides in the neighbourhood of Brotas. Salvador, Bahia, Brazil, October, 2005.

In the process of reflexively inserting the self into the ethnographic ‘fiction’—motivated by particular political agendas, beliefs or by the desire to avoid the kind of omniscience they believed flawed so much modernist ethnography—anthropologists like Clifford and those that have followed have created an *ultimate* kind of authority. With biases revealed and agendas made visible, ethnographers, their involvement and commitment to the community now made textually explicit in the text, become the community’s official narrators and possessors of the truth. Why? Because subject communities and societies know, as my informant sardonically points out, how to read.

In both their texts and in their lives in Brazil, Landes and Verger made their personality and authority as anthropologists potent and palpable, and successfully presented themselves to their fieldwork community, through local elites like Bonfim and Balbino, as “artisans” of ethnography (cf. Fox 1991:9). For Landes, Verger and now also for a whole generation of Brazilian and foreign academics involved as champions of the *terreiro*, of Blackness, and the Africanity of Black Brazil, so much of themselves and what they believe in is invested in their ethnography and in their personal involvement with their community.

Beyond the evocation of heroes such as Landes and Verger, it now seems virtually impossible for any public activity, whether an art opening, a community re-invigoration project, the commemoration of a slave hero such as Zumbí, African reconnection projects, or any of a host of other events to take place in Salvador without some connection with the scholars at UFBA’s Centro de

Estudos Afro-Orientais (CEAO). CEAO has become a clearing house for all things remotely connected with Africa and Afro-Brazilian scholarship in Salvador and they have, through their courses in Yoruba and Arabic that draw students, both young and old, from throughout the city, extended their influence deeply into community organisations and *terreiros* in almost every neighbourhood.

Moreover, many of the scholars and students associated with CEAO are diligent devotees of a variety of different Afro-Brazilian religious congregations: some of them members of so-called 'pure' Yoruba-centric *Candomblé terreiros*, others practitioners of *Umbanda*, and some openly 'eclectic' about their religious beliefs. I would assert that it is now almost *de rigueur* at CEAO, with few exceptions, that to be an anthropologist or other social scientist and to study Afro-Brazilian populations, one must embrace the African religious heritage of Bahia—perhaps not always as a believer, but certainly at the cultural or folkloric level. A relationship—one might say dialogic and symbiotic—has developed between those who seek to be representatives of an African-oriented identity for Black Brazilians living in Salvador and more generally in all of Brazil with the scholars and scholarship that advocate understanding of the truly 'African' quality of Black society in Brazil.

I reiterate here that I am not so much concerned, like Verger and Matory, with uncovering whom the vectors and inventors of so-called African tradition were in Brazil. This work is not concerned, as Herskovits was, with mining the history of the slave past for clues as to the particular African origin of certain Afro-

Brazilian or Afro-Latino traditions. I am more concerned with exploring how Black communities in Brazil, and specifically in Bahia, employ 'Africa' as a key signifier of Black ethnic identity. However, this has often been accomplished through the interaction and dialogue between members of a complex of *terreiro* elites, *bloco-afro* leaders and academics trading in ideas—both lay and ethnographic—about African culture and the history of slavery.

Chapter 8: Christianity and Brazilian Blackness

Despite the pre-eminence and celebrity-like status accorded individuals like Mãe Stella, Mestre Didi, Balbino and Castro de Araujo, the *terreiros*, the *blocos-afros* and their counterparts in the academy do not exert a monolithic influence on Salvador's and Bahia's Black communities. There are other voices and other perspectives on how Black communities should be mobilised to fight racism and alternate identities available for Black individuals to engage and articulate.

That a battle between syncretism and purity in *Candomblé* can even exist attests to the underlying fact that large numbers of Afro-Brazilians, even those who assert an African-oriented manifestation of Blackness, still cling to some form of baseline Catholicism. A large white wooden cross even stood on the grounds of Opô Afonjá, the stalwart of the Africa-centric movement, for a long period of time. Catholicism has more of the character of a ethnic identity for many Brazilians than a religion and it is not one that is easily washed away.

The Africa-centric movement has certainly become culturally dominant in Salvador. However, despite this ascendancy, most Black residents of Salvador still cling to an underlying reverence for Christianity. One need only spend an hour walking through any neighbourhood in Salvador to quickly discover the importance of Christianity. It truly is hard to walk more than a hundred metres down any street in the city without passing at least a couple of churches. The

prevalence of Christian places of worship seems, at times, to be incongruous with Salvador's image as the centre of Afro-Brazilian religion. As we have seen, throughout Salvador, African-oriented aspects of Bahia's culture are placed front and centre by tourist agencies, intellectual elites and religious crusaders like Mãe Stella and Mestre Didi. They prevail in all popular depictions of Salvador and form an important part of the daily lives of many Black people in Salvador. However, although Stella and Didi emphasise that these African forms must take precedence over Christian beliefs or European ideals, this strident and militant point of view, though highlighted and accentuated by scholars and media, does not always represent the realities of life for many individuals in Salvador. For many Blacks in the city, even those who are member of proudly Yoruba-centric *terreiros*, there remains a powerful respect and reverence for the Catholic Church. Part of this is because of Catholicism's historical place as the quasi-official religion of Brazil. The other reason for this seemingly indelible reverence to the Church is that manifestations of Catholicism in Salvador often include their own forms of African-oriented practice and Black identity discourse.

Vast numbers of people in the Black neighbourhoods also now turn to the growing number of evangelical churches in Brazil for religious succour. Members of these churches are explicitly forbidden from being involved in any aspect of Afro-Brazilian worship as evangelical churches see these practices as devil worship and witchcraft. The Black movements very much see this intolerance and hatred of *Candomblé* and other Afro-Brazilian religions as nothing less than

racism. In the discourse of the *blocos-afros* and the *terreiros*, despite the exhortations of Mãe Hilda, Mestre Didi and other so-called *militantes*, there is an awareness, I believe, that Catholicism is something that can never be entirely expunged from the hearts and minds of their devotees or from the Black community—it is too deeply engrained. However, these groups are openly hostile towards the evangelical churches, especially the megachurches, which continue to make inroads into poorer Black communities.

Also, the often unquestioned association of Blackness with the identity rhetoric of the *blocos-afros* and the *terreiros* is something that is heavily criticised both by the leaders of the evangelical churches and by individuals from Black communities and neighbourhoods who want very little to do with African-oriented religion, community groups or academics. Large numbers of evangelicals in Salvador are Black and they often find themselves in conflict with friends and neighbours who berate them for “betraying” their people or their communities. To be sure, participation in a *Candomblé* centre or in a Black community group is not a pre-requisite for living in a Black neighbourhood or to be identified as an *Afro-Brasileiro*, but there is, as one individual—an evangelical—informed me in the neighbourhood of Brotas, pressure:

Existe uma pressão a ser um membro do terreiro em nossa comunidade. Não estou falando sobre ‘pressão’ pessoal...por os meus amigos, meus vizinhos, não, é um fenômeno cultural, especialmente em Salvador. Sou um evangélico, e toda a minha família são evangélicos...e somos Afro-Brasileiros também. Mas, a dizer ‘Afro’ ou ‘Negro’ em Salvador, existe também a pressão a dizer— ao mesmo tempo— ‘Candomblé’ ou ‘Umbanda’ ou

'Capoeira' ou 'Ilê Aiyê.' Porquê?

There exists a pressure to be a member of the *terreiro* in my community. I'm not talking about personal pressure...from my friends or neighbours, no, it is a cultural phenomenon, especially here in Salvador. I'm an evangelical. My whole family are evangelicals...and we are also Afro-Brazilians. But, to say 'Afro' or 'Black' in Salvador, there also exists the pressure to say—at the same time—'Candomblé' or 'Umbanda' or 'Capoeira' or 'Ilê Aiyê'. Why?

Candomblé, the Black space of the *terreiro* and the *bloco-afro* have become hyper-racialised and the forms of Black identity that have emerged from these one-time locales of resistance and opposition to power have themselves become dominant and, dare it be said, hegemonic. Slowly but surely, the peripheral cult that was *Candomblé* and the identity discourse built up around it has become the central and institutionalised cult of Black society in Bahia. Does this mean they have won the battle? That racism has been excised? Certainly not, rather, the dominance that these practices and beliefs enjoy is a cultural one—it exists at the level of perception and public awareness. However, it is an extremely powerful perception, one that belies the fact that membership in *terreiros* and other aspects of the Black movements are restricted to a segment of the Black community.

Avoiding numerical estimates of self-proclaimed Catholics⁵⁶, it is sufficient to

⁵⁶ Pierucci and Prandi (2000) have conducted a major sociological survey of religious diversity in Brazil. The claim that three-quarters of the adult population in Brazil are Catholic, while the remaining quarter is made up of followers of Evangelical churches (13%), Afro-Brazilian religions (1.5%), oriental religions and other denominations (0.5%). These numbers are presented solely to provide the reader with an idea of just how many Brazilians self-identify as Catholics. However, many of those who claim to be Catholics, certainly in Bahia, might also participate in Afro-

say that, although the influence they exert culturally and socially in Bahia is enormous, as it pertains to constructions of Black identity, Afro-Brazilian religious sects make up only a small portion of the diversity of religious activities with which members of the Black community identify. Moreover, there is considerable disagreement within the broader Black movements as to what extent political and social objectives should be tied, so inextricably it seems at times, with those of a religious organisation. In short, there is considerable contestation within Black communities about the place of *Candomblé* (Sansone 2004).

A number of scholars, most notably Butler (1998) and Burdick (Burdick 1998b), have argued that the overwhelming emphasis on the religious symbols and identitarian assertions of the *terreiro* is an extremely precarious and ultimately, untenable, trajectory for Brazil's Black movements. In 1998, when John Burdick wrote *The Lost Constituency of Brazil's Black Movements*, he noted:

Most of our informants, across all colour categories, had little concrete notion of what we meant when we referred to the black movements... most of our lifelong black informants had little prior notion of the black movements...[and that]...it is inaccurate to say that 'all' participants in the black movement in Brazil are followers of...'traditional' African religiosity. (1998b:146-147)

At the end of the 1990s, in Rio de Janeiro, this very well may have been the

Brazilian congregations and even attend, though infrequently, an evangelical church. Religious behaviour in Brazil is extremely flexible and individuals will often change their religious affiliations with considerable regularity.

case. In 2008, in Salvador, there is a much more acute awareness of what concepts such as *movimento negro*, *afro-descendente*, *bloco-afro*, African purity, anti-syncretism and Yoruba mean—not just at a general level, but rather an awareness that entails knowledge of the precise political implications of these ideas, organisations and identities. Amongst Black Catholics and evangelicals who do not participate in associations as the MNU, who have little to do with *blocos-afros* such as Ilê-Aiyê and who possess little or no connection with *terreiros* other than through the activities of family members, personalities such as Vovô, Mãe Stella and Mestre Didi still loom large, as do the agendas of *terreiros* such as Opô Afonjá.

Maria

Black Christians by far make up the majority of the Black community in Salvador and yet, in numerous interviews, these individuals claimed that their beliefs and their Black *Brazilian* culture was forced to play a secondary role to African expressions of identity. I had numerous long conversations about this very issue with Maria, a 52 year old woman and her son 14 year old son, Raimundo. Together, this mother and son duo sell the famed African ‘food of the gods’, *acarajé*⁵⁷, that Salvador has become famous for. Maria, like all *acaaje*

⁵⁷ *Acarajé* is an Afro-Brazilian culinary speciality made of a bean flour fritter, deep fried in palm oil and served with shrimp, chilli, cilantro and other condiments. Most Brazilians see it as the food that best represents the cuisine of the northeast state of Bahia, as it is commonly believed to be African in origin. Indeed, *acarajé* does owe much to the West African dish of àkàrà, a similar form of fritter common in Nigeria and a likely precursor to the *acarajé* of the slave period. Because of its African origins, *acarajé* is typically presented as an offering to the ‘*orixás*’ in *terreiros*. Beyond

sellers or *Baianas*, as they are called, wears a long white dress, elaborated with lace and embroidered with cowries along with a length of white lace tied around her head. Maria is a strong-willed woman and a delight to speak with and I always made sure to stop by her stall and buy some food every time I visited Pelourinho. I always found her *acarajé* to be the best in Salvador and found her demeanour to be comfortingly similar to another community of strong market women with whom I had become familiar in the huge Kejetia market of Kumasi in central Ghana. The similarity was more than just in mannerism and comportment. The *acarajé* sellers of Salvador are organised into a loose union-like association or confederation of *Baianas* that regulates price and quality. This organisation is controlled and operated by women and not at all unlike the ethnographically famous 'Asante market women' of Kejetia.

Maria very much represents the folklorised image of a Black woman steeped in the heritage and history of an African past. Around her *acarajé* stand are small statues of beloved *orixás*, most notably Yemanjá, *orixá* of the sea and a deity that is usually associated with images of the Virgin Mary. Also visible are stickers and flags with the pan-African colours of red, yellow and green, along with images of Bob Marley and political decals for the PT, the governing Partido dos

the religious space of the *terreiro*, *acarajé* is also sold on almost every street corner in Bahia by working-class women of all ages as quick street food and is consumed in large amounts by locals and tourists alike. The image of the *acarajé* seller—dressed in a flowing white dress elaborated with lace and beads—selling this so-called 'food of the gods' is one of the most iconic images of Salvador. It is often used by tourist agencies and travel companies to depict the city as Black and African.

Trabalhadores of President Lula. After almost a year of patronising Maria's stall and chatting with her informally, I decided it was time to sit down and ask her about some of things that had been coalescing in my mind and in my notebooks. I started simply:⁵⁸

AD: Do you go to a *terreiro*?

Maria: Never! I would never set foot in a *terreiro*. I'm not one of these militant types. I don't make much selling *acarajé* and the cost of *dendê* [palm oil] keeps rising, but what can the *terreiro* do about that. As for me, I'm a Catholic. All my family are Catholics and that is not going to change.

AD: But you wear the clothes of someone who goes to the *terreiro*, no? These long white dresses and white headbands? Don't the *candomblecistas* wear these clothes?

Maria: Yes, they wear these clothes so I have to wear these clothes. People come to Salvador for an Afro experience. That means *Candomble* and *acarajé*—they go together like America and hamburgers. That's what people expect me to wear. I won't sell any *acarajé* if I wear trousers or skirts. Nobody would buy from me. So I have to wear this thing and I have to be the one selling. See here, I have my son, Raimundo helping me. But he cannot be the one to package up the food and give it to the customers. He can stir the oil, or stoke the fire, but the passing of the food to the customers has to be me. They expect women to be selling this food. Not men.

Of this point, there can be little doubt. In a survey I conducted over the course of fifteen months of fieldwork in Salvador, I found only three out of two hundred *acarajé* stalls that were run by men. During this study, I ate an awful lot of *acarajé*, but the fashion in which it was prepared, packaged and sold was

⁵⁸ Interview with Maria and Raimundo, Pelourinho, Salvador, Bahia, Brazil, December 2005. The conversational format of this interview does not facilitate presentation of original Portuguese.

consistent. At every stall, the woman was dressed in a long flowing white dress with some kind of elaboration made of lace, shells or ribbon along with a white turban or head-cloth. Furthermore, out of the two hundred stalls that I sampled, only twenty-six of the sellers could be considered to occupy an ethnic category other than visibly Black.

Raimundo: One time my mother was sick with Dengue. Dengue can be bad here in Salvador. I ran the stall and sold nothing! It was a big day also, it was a Tuesday, which is when Olodum performs on the street, so we have to be ready to sell. But I sold practically nothing except to regulars.

AD: OK, I understand. Then why have the images of Yemanjá on the stall if you don't believe in that stuff.

Maria: I don't believe but I have to dress the stall appropriately. My church is here in Pelo—The *Igreja Rosário dos Pretos*. That is where, every year, we have our 'Day of the Baiana.

A Igreja de Nossa Senhora do Rosário dos Pretos [Church of Our Lady of the Rosary of the Blacks] is a Catholic Church in Pelourinho that is oriented towards primarily serving the Black community of the old city. It was constructed in 1704 by freedmen and slaves who laboured in what little free time they had and was sponsored by the *Irmandade de Nossa Senhora do Rosário dos Homens Pretos do Pelourinho* [Sisterhood of Our Lady of the Rosario of Black Men of Pelourinho]. Although the church is designed as a traditional Catholic place of worship in the rococo style, a number of motifs in the blue façade allude to the presence of African practices that were present in Salvador at the time of construction. Additionally, many of the parishioners are involved in some of the less militant and less African-oriented manifestations of Afro-Brazilian religiosity.

AD: But surely many of the other *acarajé* sellers must go to the *terreiro*?

Maria: Yes, many do. But listen. Do you see more churches or more *terreiros* in Salvador? Walk around this city or take the bus and on every corner there is a church. I'm not exaggerating and I'm not talking about the evangelicals. There are just as many of those [evangelical churches] as there are Catholic churches. So that must mean that most people are Christians. Then why, everywhere you go in this city, it is *Candomblé* and *orixás* and Africa. I'm not African, I'm Brazilian!

AD: Would you say that the majority of women who sell *acarejé* in the city are Christians?

Maria: I won't say that there aren't Baianas who aren't part of Opô Afonjá or Casa Branca or one of these places. I won't say that there aren't *acarajé* sellers who don't believe in the ideals of *movimento negro* or the militant groups. But the majority of us are married women with children. We don't have time for this nonsense. We want to make what small money we can selling this food.

AD: OK, so tell me about the food. *Acarajé* is African no? It is derived from food eaten by the slaves.

Maria: Listen, when people ask me the story of *acarajé*, I tell them that yes, it comes from Africa. I think it means 'bundle' or 'ball' or something like that in Yoruba. But all I know is that this is Bahian food. Maybe it is African in origin, but we do it differently. What do I know about Africa? Nothing. What do Africans know about me? Nothing. So you can say this is African, but I call it Brazilian.

Maria is very devout about her Catholicism and her devotion to the church of Nossa Senhora do Rosário dos Pretos. The church is the centre of her community and the cornerstone of her social universe. The church and the Pastoral Afro⁵⁹ ministry that works within this parish is concerned with many of

⁵⁹ The Centro Arquidiocesano de Articulação da Pastoral Afro [Archdiocese Centre for the African Pastoral] or Pastoral Afro is an important outreach project of the Catholic Church that ministers specifically to Black communities and deals with Black issues. The Pastoral Afro is very much

the same issues that have mobilised groups like Ilê Aiyê and Opô Afonjá: fighting racism; poverty in Black communities; dignity for the Black people in Brazil and respect for Black history—but their approach is much less oriented towards a celebration of Africa and the African.

Maria tells me she is understanding of her neighbours who go to the *terreiro* and she even admits to a certain affection for Yemanjá, whom she believes is actually more Brazilian than African. “*Mas porque? Porque eles não têm nenhum respeito para nossas tradições como Anastácia e nossa religião Católica? Eles controlam tudo!*” [But why, why do they have no respect for our traditions like Anastácia and our Catholic religion? They control everything].



Figure 8.1 Maria, the *acarajé* seller in her usual location on the streets of Pelourinho. Maria has been selling *acarajé* at this location for over ten years.

concerned with racism and fighting poverty in Black communities and has grown out of Brazil's liberation theology movement.

There are two important statues or religious icons that Maria told me to go and observe in the Igreja da Nossa Senhora that would provide me with a different perspective on Black religions in Bahia. One of these images was, of course, the large statue of Nossa Senhora da Aparecida. In Brazil, Nossa Senhora da Aparecida is considered the national patron Saint and, like other iterations of the Virgin in predominantly Catholic countries or regions—Guadalupe in Mexico, Fátima in Portugal and Lourdes in France—has come to symbolise contested notions of national identity.

The story of Nossa Senhora da Aparecida is one that, even in a Brazil where evangelical religions are eclipsing the quasi-official Catholicism of the state, every schoolchild can recount. As the story goes, in 1717, a Portuguese nobleman named Pedro Miguel de Almeida Portugal e Vasconcellos arrived in the town that would later be called Aparecida or ‘appeared’. In honour of his arrival, local fishermen were asked to bring in as many fish as they could from the Paraiba River. Despite treacherous weather, three brave fishermen, Domingos Garcia, Joilo Alves and Felipe Pedroso went out on the river. While on the waters, rather than catching a haul of fish, they pulled in a statue of the Virgin that had become entangled in their nets. Most notably, the effigy of the Virgin had not the pale skin of a European but rather the dark brown skin of the typical Brazilian peasant or *caboclo*. Soon after the discovery fishing in the region became abundant, with nets overflowing with fish. The ‘Appeared Lady’ soon became the patron of fishermen throughout Brazil and, in 1822, Pedro I raised

her to the status of patroness of the Empire.

Later, in 1931, when Getulio Vargas took control of Brazil from a military junta, he promoted the Catholic Church as the state's semi-official religion and the Lady as the symbol of a united Brazil. Vargas, a populist if ever there was one, saw the colour of the Lady as one which precisely tied into the growing belief that Brazil was a country in which the different founding races—European, African and Amerindian—would come to together to form a new and prosperous tropical society. At the same time he gave his principal Catholic advisor, Cardinal Leme, free reign in suppressing and denouncing the Afro-Brazilian religious cults. Nossa Senhora da Aparecida has now become a powerful marker of racially mixed public space, “one that was transformed through miscegenation into the folkloric shadow of the mulatto” (Johnson 1997:128)

However, over the past 10 years or so, especially in Bahia, in churches like Nossa Senhora do Rosário, the complexion of most statues of Aparecida has shifted from one of dark brown to being decidedly Black, representing, Johnson suggests, “a new configuration of what and who, occupies the centre of Brazilian public space” (1997:140). In Bahia, it is Blackness, regardless of whether one refers to the dominant images of an Africanised religious space or the more nationally recognisable image of the ‘Appeared Lady’ that defines the key symbols of public space, especially in an area like Pelourinho.

The other image that Maria wanted to take me to see in the back of Nossa

Senhora do Rosário was a shrine to Anastácia. A slave from the Angolan coast, not from West Africa, Anastácia was brought to Rio as a slave and became the mistress of her white master. When his wife found out about the affair, she had Anastácia “silenced” with a ceramic disk placed inside her mouth, secured by a leather strap. This form of torture eroded the mouth and led to starvation and death. Anastácia has thus been sanctified and venerated by Afro-Brazilians, especially women, throughout the country and followers regard her as holy and claim miracles on her behalf, although the Catholic Church has not canonized her. Anastácia's attempt to voice her oppression and her martyrdom has become an inspiration to other Blacks who pay their respects to her in the Catholic ‘inculturated mass’. This mass is an attempt, according to Burdick, “to salvage the history and culture of Afro-Brazilians from the oblivion to which racist society seeks to consign them, by imparting knowledge about African culture” (1998a:57), but within, I would add, the context of Catholicism.

The Black movements are reticent about Anastácia and the inculturated mass because of its connection with the Catholic Church. Furthermore, they believe devotion to Anastácia focuses on a narrative that provides Blacks with a fatalistic solution to racism—one in which a Black woman had to be beaten, gagged and martyred before she could be liberated (Burdick 1998a:151-152). However, women like Maria revere Anastácia precisely because, she tells me, her story is one that all Black women can relate to and because the inculturated mass and the message of the Pastoral Afro focuses more on domestic matters.



Figure 8.2 A statue of Anastácia in the rectory of the Igreja do Rosario in Pelourinho

Black leaders point out that the inculturated mass mainly serves women who are concerned with finding a supernatural panacea for what ails their communities and families. This is at odds with the political agendas of leaders like Mãe Stella and Vovô, whose emphasis on Africanity as a militant new identity for Black people is to instill righteous indignation and anger over the historical devalorisation of African culture in Brazil.

Every Tuesday, the same day that Pelourinho throws its gates open to public manifestations of Africanity such as performance by Olodum and official

guided tours of local *terreiros*, an inculturated mass is held at the Nossa Senhora do Rosário church. I met Maria one Tuesday and accompanied her to the service. Almost everybody who attended the Mass would be considered Black or would openly self-identify as such.

Preto, which means Black in Portuguese, was the term that was, for a very long time, used to describe the skin colour of those present at the Mass I attended. However, Maria tells me that, even among non-militant Christian communities such as hers, this word is increasingly seen as derogatory and that the more emphatic category of *negro* is preferred by her and by many of her fellows. The movement away from the term *preto* towards acceptance of *negro* has been a slow process in Salvador. *Preto*, although certainly a category associated with race and ethnic identity, more connotes Black or dark skin colour, rather than ancestry. It is analogous to the use of the word 'coloured' to describe Black people in the United States prior to desegregation. However, *negro* has long been associated not so much with a certain skin colour but with a history of slave ancestry—to call someone *negro* in Brazil once meant to highlight their descent from slaves and their position as part of an oppressed population. However, with the growth of the Brazilian Black power movements in the 1970s, the development of the MNU and the increasing pro-African stance of the *terreiros*, *negro* is now associated not so much with slavery, but with Africanity. To be sure, slavery is a part of the African-oriented identity articulated by the Black movements, but not in a derisive or oppressive form. Rather, descent from

slaves now implies African descent. Maria and her fellow parishioners at Nossa Senhora do Rosário do not embrace Africanity but they do embrace the word *negro* as it has come to be used by Black communities in Salvador beyond Africa-centric *terreiros* and *blocos-afros*.

The mass, described in detail by Burdick (1998a) and also by Selka (2007), is one in which many of the movements, expressions and vocalisations bear a striking similarity to those found in the *terreiro*. But, Maria insists, they are being done for God, for Jesus and for the Virgin, not for “*espíritos dos lorubas*” [Yoruba spirits]. Maria tells me that she believes most government agencies and what she calls “*os intelectuais*” don’t understand how to talk to the Black community without talking in terms of Afro-Brazilian religiosity nor, she asserts, are they interested in issues of poverty and economic difficulties. Maria is convinced that the Black movements in Bahia have been sidetracked by what she believes to be “purely cultural matters” and meanwhile “*os povos negros ainda são pobres*”⁶⁰ [Black people are still poor].

As I noted, Maria is force to be reckoned with. She herself challenged me to do the survey of other *acarajé* sellers throughout the city and to come back and tell her what I discovered:

AD: What should I ask them?

⁶⁰ Interview with Maria, Salvador, Bahia, Brazil. 09/01/2006.

Maria: Tell them the truth. Tell them you are doing a study on the society of Bahia and you want to know something about *acarajé*. Ask them their names, where they live and whether or not they go to the *terreiro*.

AD: And if they lie?

Maria: Sure some people will lie. That's life. But you should ask. Remember, in Salvador people don't hide that they are *candomblecistas* anymore. It's not like the old days when all that stuff was underground. Some people will lie if they work for some boss who is evangelical and they don't like the *terreiro*. But I think you'll get the truth. Go and see.

In the survey I found that out of the 197 *acarajé* sellers who were women—I discounted the ones run by men—only twenty of them openly admitted to being members of a *terreiro*. The rest were either practicing Catholics or members of an evangelical group. These numbers did not surprise Maria and nor would they likely come as any shock to members of the *Candomblé* community who, despite their far-reaching and increasingly powerful cultural clout, still insist they are a subjugated and oppressed religious minority.

Members of Ilê Aiyê informed me that, despite the work of the Pastoral Afro and churches like Nossa Senhora do Rosário, they feel that the Catholic church is a place where non-Black or non-Afro elites are still in control and that the only place where Blacks really have a say are in the Africanised spaces such as the *terreiro* and *blocos-afros*. Others have suggested that the work of Mãe Stella, Mestre Didi and others is being undone by practices such as the inculturated Mass. They see any attempts to make Catholicism more “African” by adding ‘some drums’ as ultimately deceitful, in that it is trying to appeal to Black people

and keep them in the Church using “coercive” means that distort the Yoruba culture.⁶¹

Maria believes that racism exists in Brazil and that, even with the dominance of an African-oriented expression of Blackness in Bahia, racism still pervades her home state. But she does not equate her position in life—that she has been selling snacks on the streets of Pelourinho for over ten years—as a product of a racist society nor does she view the ferment of ideologies about the place of African societies in Bahia that emerge from the *blocos-afros* and the *terreiro* as a solution to her problems. There’s a certain resignation in Maria to the fact that she will probably be selling *acarajé* for the rest of her life and that no amount of politicking or Yoruba rituals are ever going to rescue her from that. Instead, she seems to find a certain degree of serenity in her Catholic faith, one that does present her with images of divine or sacred Blackness, but that also emphasises the Brazilian as opposed to the African.

Burdick (1998b) has suggested that there are two reasons why people like Maria have become alienated from the Africanising discourse of individuals like Vovô and Mãe Stella: one is a rejection of African religiosity; the other is a lack of identification with colour categories such as *negro*. In the case of Maria and many of her colleagues in the *acarajé* business, there is a strong willingness to be openly identified as *negro* and not by one of the myriad other phenotypic

⁶¹ Group interview with associates of Ilê Aiyê, Salvador, Bahia, Brazil, 10/10/2005.

categories that are replete within Brazilian Portuguese. But Burdick's assertion that the now almost ironclad bonds that bind Black political movements with African-oriented religious practice disaffect many Brazilian Blacks still appears to be very much the case.

There is perhaps no more ubiquitous example of folklorised Africanity than women like Maria: her clothes; the food she sells; the asserted matriarchy of Yoruba religious practice that Mãe Stella and Cléo Martins claim were 'revealed' by Landes—all of these symbols are embodied in this one individual. Yet she openly rails against the notion that, as a Black woman in Salvador, she must necessarily look to Africa as a source of cultural authenticity for her identity. She is perfectly willing, as are the scores of other *Baianas* that sell their wares on the streets of Salvador, to manipulate and incorporate those same symbols into their dress, their manner, their speech and onto the small wooden stalls they cart around along with propane tanks and aluminium pots. But, she insists, they do not define who she is as an Afro-Brazilian woman

I believe that in understanding how women such as Maria use the trope of Bahian Africanity in order to make a living while at the same time living what could only be called an eminently Brazilian existence, one that incorporates many of the aspects of a creolised Black culture, we can find the kind of analytical middle ground that M.G. Smith (1957) suggested that anthropologists of Afro-America needed to find: one that seeks to reconcile the positions of Frazier and Herskovits in an approach that understands how so-called 'Africanisms' are used

in daily social life. Maria makes use of Africanity in her daily life, but she does not let it define every action she takes and neither does she seek to blithely dismiss it out of hand as irrelevant to her current existence. She is Black, proud and happy to be associated with symbols like Anastácia, but resents the popular belief that simply because she sells 'African' food and wears the white dress of the *terreiro*, that she must necessarily subscribe to those beliefs.

The reason, Maria believes, for why the Black movements are unable to disassociate themselves from the *terreiro* and the militant organisations is a combination of guilt on the part of intellectuals and government elites for the history of slavery in Bahia, the exotic nature of *Candomblé* and African rituals, and the massive investment that the tourist industry in Bahia has made in making the state live up to its description as a 'Black Rome'. She tells me:

*Meu filho, eu te adoro, mas, os intelectuais, os antropólogos e os historiadores como você...você é uma grande parte do problema. A indústria de turismo e o governo são cometidos de este trajetória, e eles dependem nos acadêmicos como você.*⁶²

[My son, I think you are great, but the intellectuals, the anthropologists and the historians like you...you are a big part of the problem. The tourist industry and the government are committed to this trajectory and they depend on academics like you.]

In an attempt to better understand what Maria had told me, I related her story to three individuals in Salvador and their respective responses are quite

⁶² Interview with Maria, Salvador, Bahia, Brazil. 12/01/2006.

instructive in understanding how different factions within the Black community view the Africanising emphasis of the *terreiros* and *blocos-afros*.

Georgia

After talking to Georgia about my experiences with Maria, his responses, predictably, were couched in the same no-nonsense and pragmatic language that I had come to expect from him.

“What do you expect?” he told me, “I do what I have to do to make money, so does your friend. She knows that if she doesn’t wear those clothes or put *orixás* on her stove then nobody will buy from her. She is doing the same things that I do.” Georgia tells me that he knows many *Baianas* that work in Pelourinho and in Saúde and that he believes most of them are Christians of some denomination who simply see the white clothes and *orixá* statues as a necessary part of the paraphernalia needed to do their work. “No different,” he tells me, “than my Rastaman headbands and Fela tee-shirts. I do what I gotta do to make money. I don’t need no *terreiro* or some religion to tell me I am an African like some of these people.”⁶³

Georgia, more than anything, is an opportunist, and he sees the emphasis on African culture and the work of people like Mãe Stella and other elites as providing him with the opportunity for him to make a little more money, to survive

⁶³ Interview with Georgia through email. 14/06/07.

another day or to get ahead somehow. He is certainly proud of his African heritage, of Ghana, and he loves playing reggae or high-life music to packed houses in Pelourinho, but he is not religious and he cares not a whit about issues of racialised identity in Brazil. He is fatalistic in some ways, proclaiming that this kind of talk is how “the Black man has been talking forever. We are always trying to get the white man to see and respect our culture. But all we do is end up selling it. That’s what they do in Ghana and that’s what they are doing here. I don’t care anymore, so long as I can make some money. Personally, I got no time for religion.”

Edmar

Edmar is a 49-year old woman who lives in the neighbourhood of Engenho Velho, not far from the very large, very rich and very famous *terreiro* of Casa Branca. She works outside a petrol station on the busy main street of Avenida Vasco da Gama where, like Maria, she has sold *acarajé* for over ten years. Also like Maria, Edmar is a practicing Catholic; however, she was also a devout member of Casa Branca for eight years and was, for a very short period, a member of the Foursquare evangelical church. Edmar tells me that she is ambivalent about the ascendance of the Africa-centric movement in the Black neighbourhoods and in the Africanised public image of Bahia. She believes that they are not doing any harm and in fact are helping enhance awareness of Brazil’s African heritage and improve the life of many Black people in Salvador. Without the *terreiro*, she tells me, people wouldn’t come to Salvador and the

city's economy wouldn't be what it is. Tourism, she believes, is the key to Salvador's future and if it means selling a little bit of Black heritage to 'Paulistas' or foreigners, then that is fine by her.

I told Edmar about Maria's attitudes. She felt that her colleague was being a little too harsh. She believes that the *terreiros* and *blocos-afros* do many good things and that they do give many young Black children a chance to express themselves as Black people without resorting to gangs and drugs.

AD: But if the *terreiros* do have a positive message, then why did you leave?⁶⁴

Edmar: Because, in some ways, the *terreiro*—well, Casa Branca anyway—has become too popular, too commercialised. Every week there was a news crew from Globo or some event or another wanting to film the grounds. Opô Afonjá is no different. People are always there trying to interview Mãe Stella. Listen, I still believe in the *orixás*. They are an important part of who I am, but too many *terreiros* emphasise activism and being radical. All I want is a private, quiet place to talk to God. I tried the evangelicals, but I didn't like the way they talk about Black culture. They treat the *orixás* like they are demons and tell people to reject all of their Black traditions. I couldn't accept that. I spoke to a priest who is from Pastoral Afro at the local church here in Vasco who buys *acarajé* from me all the time. He said to come back to the Catholic Church and see what we have to offer. I went back and I don't regret it.

AD: But what do you think of Maria's comments that the *terreiro* don't respect the Pastoral Afro or Anastácia?

Edmar: I think she is right in some ways, they don't respect us. But it is not done in a hurtful way. The problem is, they want to speak for *all* black people [emphasis hers]. They believe strongly that

⁶⁴ Interviews with Edmar. Salvador, Bahia, Brazil. 14/02/2006.

Brazil is a racist country and that they must fight fire with fire. I don't agree completely. I know there is racism in Brazil but you can't always connect religion with politics. You know there is a bar in my neighbourhood where they have a sign hanging up: No religion, No politics. Our neighbourhood, Engenho Velho da Federação is one of the oldest neighbourhoods in the city. We have all peoples here: Blacks, whites, Japanese, everyone, and we have evangelicals, Catholics and *candomblecistas*. So to keep the peace at the bar, the owner said: no talking politics or religion—they cause too much trouble. Imagine what happens when you mix politics and religion. Ohhhh, too much. That is the problem with all *terreiro*.

AD: Doesn't the Catholic Church do this also?

Edmar: Yes, but they do it quietly and even though the Pastoral Afro includes African culture they are more *Brazilian* about it. What do I know about the Yoruba? What do any Brazilians know about the Yoruba? Nothing, Nothing.

I found Edmar's perspectives on the *terreiro* and on the elites of Black identity in Salvador echoed throughout the city among other women who sold *acarajé* on the streets. They approve of the general message of Black solidarity and anti-racism, and they hold respect for the African-oriented form of Blackness that the *terreiro* and *blocos-afros* represented but the women did so in subtle ways. Unlike Burdick's informants, there existed no reluctance on their part to discuss how many of the travails that they dealt with in their daily lives were the products of a racist society, but they did not believe that the strident politico-religious message of anti-syncretism, re-Africanisation and anti-Catholicism truly resonated with them. I do not believe that any of them were still clinging to some shred of belief in racial democracy or other such utopian ideal of harmony. Rather, Edmar and her 'sisters' simply seemed more concerned with what can only be described as 'bread-and-butter' issues. Problems of racial and religious

intolerance were, by contrast, the furthest things from their minds.

Most women like Edmar are born into a society in which they are most likely destined for a job employed as a domestic, in the service industry, selling or making food, or a similar kind of work. Indeed, most Black women born in places like Engenho Velho will rarely move out of their home neighbourhood, let alone to another city—all of this is part of a society in which racism exists in silent and institutionalised ways. The Black movement, through intimate association with the African religious centres, has staked its future on the belief that only through the adoption of a Black identity that emphasises the African can liberation from poverty and racism be achieved. Yet, this message simply does not resonate with a great many Black men and women like Maria and the other *acarajé* sellers. One is almost inclined to say that the die is cast and that there is no going back for the Black movements of Salvador. The investment by numerous stakeholders, academics included, in the culture and identity discourse of the elites of the Black community is enormous.

There is one group, however, that stands firmly against this Africanising trend. They are an increasingly powerful and large segment of Brazilian society, which portrays the Africanising of Black Brazilian culture as collusion with the devil. They are also a group that is just as vociferously denounced by people like Mãe Stella and by many Catholics as foreign, as ‘not Brazilian’ and as the agents of real racism and intolerance in Brazilian society: the fundamentalist evangelicals.

Marisol

Marisol is a member of the evangelical church, Igreja Universal do Reino de Deus. I met Marisol at Salvador's large bus station or Rodoviário as I waited for a bus that would take me to the small interior town of Bom Jesus da Lapa in the heart of the Brazilian *sertão*.

I started chatting with Marisol as both of us were waiting for the same bus and I soon discovered that Marisol had come to Salvador six years ago as a student from another small town in the interior. She told me that she was raised in the *terreiro*, but that *Candomblé* in rural Bahia was very different from what she found in the big city. She says that her form of *Candomblé* was one that was very private, not elaborate and showy like the big *terreiros* of Salvador. Still, initially, she was not turned off completely. She found a small *terreiro* in her new home community of Brotas in Salvador and started practicing with some of her neighbours who were also *candomblecistas*. After awhile, however, she left the *terreiro* because, she tells me, she became weary of the continued efforts to engage in political activity and to rally against the evangelical churches in the neighbourhood. She tells me: "*A minha mãe é uma evangélica, ela é da Igreja Universal. Eu não gostava de como eles sempre falaram mal sobre os evangélicos*"⁶⁵ [My mother is an evangelical, she goes to the Igreja Universal. I didn't like the way they always spoke ill of the evangelicals].

⁶⁵ Interview with Marisol, Rodoviário, Salvador, Bahia, Brazil, 01/02/2006

Marisol herself is now also a member of Igreja Universal. She informed me that she now truly believes that the direction the Black community is headed in is, in her words, “evil.” Furthermore, she sincerely believes that those who are leading the community down this “road to damnation” are the heads of *terreiros* and any other organisation that approves of “devil worship.”

Evangelical leaders suggest that possession by demons can be passed on through contact with those who participate in cults like *Candomblé* or even through eating Afro-Brazilian foods, such as *acarajé*. The link between *acarajé* and the *terreiro* is a powerful one in Salvador and, traditionally, *acarajé* vendors are seen as the *filhas da Iansã* [daughters of *Iansã*], another widely beloved *orixá*. But with the spread of evangelical Pentecostal churches, *acarajé* has become embroiled in a dispute that involves gender, religion and race over who has control over this food item.

In the past few years, some *acarajé* sellers have refused to wear the white dresses and headwear, claiming that they are happy to make this typically ‘Bahian’ culinary treat but will not wear the symbols of witchcraft. Among the two hundred sellers that I interviewed, none of them, even the evangelicals, had ceased to wear the white dress but some of them did say that what they sold had nothing to do with Africa—this is “*comida Baiana*” [Bahian food] they tell me. This is a topic that Marisol raised with me in the bus station when, during our discussion, I had stepped away to buy a couple of *acarajé* to eat while we waited: “*acarajé é a comida do diabo. Eu como acarajé só na Igreja*” [*acarajé is the food*

of the devil. I only eat *acarajé* in Church]. She's speaking here about what has come to be known in Salvador as *acarajé de Jesus* or 'Jesus's *acarajé*'.

Leaders like Mãe Stella have spoken out against this trend. She and other *ialorixás* take great umbrage at the notion that a foodstuff so intimately connected with *Candomblé* and with Africa could be usurped by the evangelical churches. Further, many members of the Black movements have also been angered that evangelicals who sell *acarajé*, many of them outside the large *Templo Maior* [Main Temple] of the Igreja Universal, are now men. The sale of this foodstuff has traditionally been reserved for women and this intrusion is another sign, for the *terreiro*, that the evangelicals have no respect for their African traditions.

I told Marisol about my friend in Pelourinho, Maria, who makes a living selling *acarajé*, and said that she didn't seem like a 'devil worshipper' to me. She told me that, even though she may not actually worship demons, she is dangerously close to demonic thoughts, demonic energy and, through her connection with *acarajé* and the inculturated mass, that Maria was close to Africa. Africa was, in Marisol's words, a land of evil spirits that had to be tamed by the 'sacred fire' of Christendom just as her church was doing with the Black communities of Bahia and in Amazonia. The Catholic Church, she told me, allowed too much syncretism to take place in Brazil and, consequently, the devil had gained a strong foothold in her country through practices that came from Africa: "*Qualquer coisa que é associado com a África tem o toque do mau*" [anything that is associated with Africa has the touch of evil].

Nonetheless, many evangelical groups adopt practices and symbols directly from the possession cults. Stylistically, the form and pattern of a Pentecostal mass in one of the large megachurches borrows many of the underlying beliefs and modes of religious practice found in *Candomblé* and *Umbanda*, including the principle of spiritual possession and the ‘mounting’ of individuals by supernatural entities, albeit to cause harm, rather than good. I made similar observations to Marisol and to a number of the other self-identified evangelicals with whom I spoke and they assured me that what they did was quite different, most often because their religion did not believe in *orixás* or African spirits but only in good and evil. There is no sense that anything has been borrowed or learned from the possession cults. Rather, evangelical leaders simply assert that they are using whatever techniques will work to attract individuals to their flock. Any entity, I was assured, that sought to take over the mind or body of a human being could only be a servant of the devil and the only cure for such an affliction is the Holy Spirit. This is why, Marisol tells me, that many former *candomblecistas* come to the evangelical churches looking to be healed after being infected with evil spirits.

Certainly spirit possession, speaking in tongues, and emotive Christian worship are part and parcel of the early Christian Church. However, the use of these techniques in the large neo-Pentecostal evangelical mega-churches of Brazil seems to owe far more to Afro-Brazilian tradition than to an awareness of Christian roots. Most preachers and ministers in the large evangelical churches—certainly in Igreja Universal—are neither scholars of Christian traditions nor

individuals who have devoted their lives to a ministry. Rather, the Brazilian neo-Pentecostal churches assert that they have broken with all that Christianity once stood for and are now in the process of redefining it for the masses of poor Brazilians. These communities often contain many individuals—especially Blacks, who, although they many not practice *Umbanda* or *Candomblé*, have a grudging regard for the power and efficacy of its traditions. Even Marisol, an avowed member of an evangelical church who rejects *Candomblé* as witchcraft, admits that, for some, the *terreiro* can work. But, she adds, the consequence of participation in such rituals is damnation. On this point, Lehmann notes:

In Brazil...the Universal Church recognises, and indeed proclaims, the efficacy of the cults, of the possession, and of the witchcraft...In its services the Universal Church—like other ‘neo-Pentecostal’ churches, adopts imprecations, gestures and symbols drawn directly from the possession cults, but without the slightest hint of a theory of identity or autochthony. It simply borrows them because the leadership or the preachers believe they will work (1998:613)

The Black elite and their academic patrons at CEAO and UFBa are aghast at this kind of appropriation, claiming that the ‘foreign’ Igreja Universal is manipulating people’s familiarity with ideas of possession and spiritual entities in order to gain followers. Francis, the Yoruba teacher at CEAO, describes the religious practice of the evangelicals as “deceitful,” claiming that it “pulls people in by appealing to their belief that supernatural solutions can be found to their problems, but not within any tradition that speaks to who they are as Black people. For the evangelicals, there are no racial differences, only souls to

harvest.”⁶⁶ Beyond the fact that the evangelicals reject *Candomblé* and the Black movements, many leaders in the *terreiro* and *blocos-afros* are genuinely disturbed by the kind of appropriation of style and practice that takes place in the large Pentecostal churches.

There is also widespread hostility towards Igreja Universal among the majority of Brazilian Catholics, especially after an incident in which a Universal church pastor was seen kicking an image of Nossa Senhora da Aparecida during his televised ministry. The event, which was staged as a protest against Nossa Senhora as a form of Catholic idolatry, took place on the 12th of October, ‘The Day of the Appeared Lady’, and became a national scandal. Birman and Lehmann write:

In this incident Pastor Sergio von Helder, head of the Universal Church in São Paulo, mocked an effigy of the Madonna and ridiculed it as a ‘doll’ and a ‘piece of plaster’, and even nudged it with his foot, provoking outrage throughout the country. The episode became known throughout the media as the ‘chute na Santa’ (chute being the term for a kick derived from the English footballing expression ‘shoot for goal’). (1999:150)

Pastor von Helder went on to describe the dark-skinned image of the Virgin as ugly, horrible, and wretched and claimed this “doll” couldn’t do anything to help the poor of Brazil and that the Catholic Church was built on a lie (Johnson 1997:131). The verbal attacks were seen levelled directly at the Catholic Church, but many Black individuals whom I spoke to in Salvador about this issue—

⁶⁶ Interview with Francis, Salvador, Bahia, Brazil, October 2005.

practitioners of *Candomblé*, Catholics and even some evangelicals, though no members of Igreja Universal—admitted to me that they saw this as a slight against Black people and towards what the Universal Church considers the idolatrous practices of many in the Black community.

Despite this desecration of a nationally beloved religious icon, in the competitive religious marketplace of Brazil, any faith that claims it can alleviate poverty and provide solutions for working class Brazilians will draw followers to its banner. This is precisely what the Igreja Universal claims it can accomplish. They donate millions of *reais* to regional Pastoral charities and openly point the finger at the efforts *Candomblé terreiros*, *blocos* like Ilê Aiyê and the Black movements in general as impotent in fighting poverty because of their misguided emphasis on anti-racism and on Africanising Blackness.

Despite Marisol's fire-and-brimstone attitude towards Africa and towards *Candomblé*, the reason why she decided to become an evangelical and leave the *terreiro* was because she felt that it did not speak to her need to, in her words, "get ahead." She was not interested in fighting racism and believes that the *terreiro* and the Black movements have caused more problems than they have solved. According to Marisol, the Black community has been failed by their leaders and by the government's emphasis on Bahia's African heritage. For her and for many other Black evangelicals that I spoke with, neither the focus on African religiosity nor the hyper-racialised language of the Black movements appears to have any meaning for them. Their [the *terreiros* and *blocos-afros*]

construction of Black identity does not resonate with people like her. She believes, quite adamantly, that only through a rediscovery of what she calls Bahia's 'Brazilian and Christian roots' will the Black community prosper. In the interior, in towns like Bom Jesus da Lapa where Christianity is strong, she tells me I can learn about these things. For her, Salvador is a lost cause because *os militantes* have taken over everything.

Chapter 9: Blackness in the Bahian *Sertão*

My first arrival in the Brazilian backlands—the *sertão*—was in the small town of Bom Jesus da Lapa on the banks of the famed Rio São Francisco at around five in the morning after a thirteen-hour bus journey over bumpy and difficult roads. Throughout the journey, somewhere in the dark and impenetrable blackness of night, I could pick up the occasional light in the distance far away from the main road, indicating perhaps a small cattle ranch, rural homestead or other tiny settlement. However, for most of the trip, little could be seen of the stark and arid landscape that I knew was out there.

As I disembarked from the bus, I could see the sun starting to peek out from the East—somewhere back there was the city I had just left, Salvador, with its tropical and sweaty climate, dilapidated buildings and frenetic atmosphere. Bom Jesus da Lapa could not have been further away—the air was hot and dry unlike Salvador where the humidity can be quite oppressive at times; the road was empty; and only one old man, wearing a torn and dirty gaucho hat, manned the bus-stop. Red dust filled the air and flies buzzed around the passengers as they emerged from the chilly, air-conditioned environment of the bus to be greeted by a wall of heat.

Brazil's interior, the *sertão*, is a storied and notorious part of the country. Home to bandits, cattle ranchers, gold and diamond prospectors looking to strike

it rich, maroon slave communities, pilgrims, prophets and messiahs of every variety, the *sertão* has always held a powerful and central place in the imaginary of Brazil and very much forms part of the national character.

In this chapter I seek to explore how rural communities such as Bom Jesus da Lapa understand the discourse of Blackness being promulgated by groups such as the purity-driven *terreiros* and *blocos-afros*. Specifically, it deals with how assertions of an African-oriented identity play in the backlands of Bahia, a place that has, historically, been home to much more integrated and creolised communities of Black Brazilians—many of whom are descendants of runaway slaves or maroons.

Sertão

The word *sertão* is difficult to translate as it does not refer to a certain kind of vegetation, lack thereof, ecotype or landform; it does not mean, as James has pointed out, unexplored or unknown country as he notes that the Brazilian back country has been “tramped over again and again for four hundred years, and again and again they have yielded wealth to any strong enough, brave enough, and persistent enough to discover and exploit their hidden resources” (1948:658). Furthermore, although *sertão* is derived, etymologically, from the same root as ‘desert’ and, in the context of Bahia and the other northeastern states, it can refer to the arid land of the interior, it is generally understood in Brazil not as a specific kind of ecological type but rather is considered synonymous with ‘frontier’

(Lombardi 1975; McCreery 2006)

The place of the *sertão* in Brazilian history as both a real and imagined 'frontier' is a major point of reference in the development of the Republic. In every respect, the Brazilian *sertão* is very much a frontier of expansion, much like the American or Canadian West or the Argentine pampas. Territorial expansion is a major theme of Brazilian history, but the pattern of westward movement differed significantly from those found in Turner's (1928) frontier thesis of American westward movement.

Despite a century of critique, leaving little of Turner's original argument intact, the frontier thesis remains an important source of inspiration for American history and has continued to prompt new explorations and investigations of how the American frontier has contributed to the building of a nation. In Turner's thesis, he asserts that the success of the United States and American identity is directly connected to the westward expansion of the country. According to Turner, America's idea of itself as a rugged and pioneering society that values individual enterprise developed in the social space between the line of western settlement and the untamed wildness of the frontier. At this juncture was forged a new kind of individual and a new society—the American was one who could tame the wildness of the West but also someone within whom was contained that same wildness. He writes:

Thus American development has exhibited not merely advance along a single line, but a return to primitive conditions on a

continually advancing frontier line, and a new development for that area. American social development has been continually beginning over again on the frontier. This perennial rebirth, this fluidity of American life, this expansion westward with its new opportunities, its continuous touch with the simplicity of primitive society, has furnished the forces dominating American character. (Turner 1893:199-227)

Those who have attempted to apply Turner's frontier thesis to the Brazilian *sertão* have seen westward movement not as an advancing line of civilisation but rather what Hennessy calls a "hollow frontier" (Hennessy 1978:98)—small groups of entrepreneurs striking out into the backlands in order to discover and exploit resources, then moving on after exhausting a locale, leaving behind a skeleton of a settlement.

The first real scholarly treatment of the *sertão* is to be found in the work of Brazilian author, engineer and sociologist Euclides da Cunha. In his 1902 work, *Os Sertões* or *Rebellion in the Backlands*, Da Cunha describes the Brazilian government's campaign against the millenarian 'holy city' of Canudos in the interior of Bahia. His main argument in this work was that the conflict between the frontiersmen of Canudos and the Old Republic of Brazil grew out of a fundamental social difference between the society of the Brazilian coast and its interior backlands. The coast of Brazil, Da Cunha argues, was characterised by a chain of modern civilisations from the Amazonian port of Belem down to Salvador and Ilhéus in Bahia through to the cities of Rio de Janeiro and the state of São Paulo. The interior was primarily composed of backward and untamed societies that needed to be brought under the control of the state (Da Cunha 1902).

Nevertheless, for Da Cunha these wild 'men of the backlands' were, as they were for Turner, the "bedrock" of Brazilian society in that they were born out of the ethnic mixing and pioneer hardiness of the interior (1902:81).

Da Cunha's report of the military suppression of the Canudos settlement in *Rebellion* is still widely read in Brazil and is often cited alongside the work of Freyre as one of the sources of root metaphors for the formation of the Brazilian sense of national identity. Yet Da Cunha's ideal of the Brazilian 'race'—the image of the raw *sertanejo*—is also an ethnic stereotype that has done as much to cement, in the national ethnic imaginary, not only the idea of the primitive and rough interior but also the perceived backwardness of northeastern Brazilian society in general. *Rebellion* painted the leader of the Canudos settlement, Antônio Conselheiro, as a demented desert mystic who was followed by a misguided band of racially mixed 'primitives' who, in the end, needed to be put down in order to prevent Brazilian society in general from descending into a similar state of degeneration.

Da Cunha emphasised that the ignorance and backwardness of *sertanejos* was, in part, a product of their long isolation from the coast and cities like Salvador. In the backlands, he asserted, society had been unaffected by the progress of evolution that most human societies were undergoing (Da Cunha 1902). Moreover, because of their removal from 'civilised' society they could not even understand their own Catholic religion—their "crude religious practices ...reveal all the stigmata of their underdeveloped mentality" (Da Cunha 1902:111-

112).

This attitude is best articulated by historian João Pandiá Calógeras, a former federal administrator in his home state of Minas Gerais, successively minister of agriculture, finance and war and ultimately Brazil's delegate to the Versailles peace conference. In his 1930 work, *A Formação Histórica do Brasil* (*The Historical Formation of Brazil*) he writes:

A população do interior é uma mescla de gente ignorante, misturada com mestiços oriundos de índios e escravos africanos. Seguem um cristianismo 'sui generis', no qual o dogma católico vem entremeado de crendices e de práticas próprias das tribos do Continente Negro, estranhamente alterado por verdadeira idolatria pagã e cerimônias supersticiosas de toda sorte. (Calógeras 1930:3)

[The population of the interior is mixture of ignorant folk, *mestiços*, along with the stains of Indians and African slaves. They follow a unique form of Christianity in which Catholic dogma is adulterated with beliefs and practices of African tribes from the 'Dark' continent, strangely altered and formed of outright pagan idolatry and superstitions of all kinds.]⁶⁷

Da Cunha's work was very much driven by a kind of pseudoscientific racism about the nature of so-called 'tropical' societies that grew out of an evolutionary framework. An important aspect of this kind of racism lay in how the environment supposedly affected the 'behaviour' of different peoples, especially those of the tropics. European scientists in the early 20th century, still energised by the growing acceptance of Darwinian models in almost every discipline of study,

⁶⁷ Translated by author.

were quick to apply their spurious models of causation to the colonies. Greenfield writes:

This rationalized the vision of the 'natives' of such places as Africa and India as children who needed firm guidance from Europeans, whose colonial endeavours essentially were fulfilling a civilizing mission. The evidence that supported such notions of 'tropical torpor' typically was the invidious comparison between the level of civilization achieved by Europeans, as opposed to that found in less temperate climes. And the explanation for this difference rested to a large extent on the presumed ease of life in the tropics. Lush tropical growth led Europeans to believe that such regions as sub-Saharan Africa could produce extravagantly with little effort. That the natives of these places had fared so poorly in terms of building on their abundant natural environment bespoke both racial and environmental incapacity, resulting in the absence of a work ethic... These tenets of European tropicology merged easily with Brazilians' long-standing belief in the abundance of their nation's resource base. (1993:38-39)

These ideas about the deficiencies of 'tropical' peoples were seized by Brazilian elites such as Calógeras as an explanation for what they saw as the 'backwardness' of the *sertão*. This region was seen as brimming with possibility and potentially held the future of the Brazilian republic, yet it was peopled with individuals whom they saw "idlers, loafers drunkards and thieves, along with freed slaves who were no better" (Do Amaral Lapa 1980:121).

Scholars of Brazilian history who have attempted to apply the Turnerian thesis to the *sertão* have, as Rausch (2008:202) points out, either ignored or downplayed the importance of the African slave and indigenous elements in opening up this part of the country. Ironically, though, early Brazilian writers such as Da Cunha and Calógeras have made explicit that while they see the kind of

racial mixing found in the interior as part of the strength of the *sertanejo*, it was also their weakness, in that it brought African practices into syncretic play with Christianity.

The movement of escaped, freed and former slaves into the Backlands is crucial to any exploration of the ethnic texture of the *sertão* and to understand the linkages between this region and the plantation societies of Salvador and the *Recôncavo*. Many Blacks along the coast saw the inland territory as a place of sanctuary, of escape from the brutalities of slavery. Consequently, throughout the *sertão*, especially in the valley of the São Francisco, congregations of ex-slaves, religious pilgrims, Amerindian groups, white settlers and farmers gave rise to communities like Bom Jesus da Lapa, to maroon communities, to religious isolate societies like Canudos and, importantly, to a thoroughly creolised society (Crist 1944).

Quilombos

Colonial Bahia and its sugar-based plantation economy depended absolutely on the coerced labour of African and Amerindian slaves. However, the threat of revolt and desertion was constant and much of Brazil's experience with slavery was beset with instability, resistance and insurrection (Schwartz 1970). Indeed, throughout the Americas, wherever slavery formed the economic basis of the society, revolt was always a constant fear for white plantation owners.

Most discussions of slave resistance focus on the great "Black Republic" of

Palmares, a *quilombo* community of over five thousand escaped slaves in the northeastern state of Alagoas that gave rise to the slave leader Zumbí (Anderson 1996; Chapman 1918; Diggs 1953). Palmares was a self-sustaining community and expressed its autonomy and distinctiveness from colonial rule in its social practices. Community members, for instance, spoke a unique language—a *patois* combination of Portuguese and African languages—and historian Mary Karasch contends that Palmares “challenged the colonial order...in a way that no other *mocambo* [*quilombo*] had ever done” (2002:106).

Zumbí was born in Palmares in 1655, but shortly after his birth, Portuguese raiding forces captured him. He was given to a Portuguese priest, Antonio Melo, who raised Zumbí as his ward until age fifteen, at which time Zumbí ran away to re-join the *quilombo* at Palmares. He had been Christened ‘Francisco’ and thoroughly Christianised by Father Melo, but when he re-joined the *quilombo* he changed his name to Zumbí (Karasch 2002:113). From this point until his death in 1695, Zumbí mounted a sustained challenge to the colonial order. Palmares became famous throughout the Northeast for its military campaigns against the Portuguese and slaves flocked to Zumbí’s banner from throughout the region (Carneiro 1946). This prompted the formation of other maroon communities during the years, 1630-1654, at which time the Portuguese were consumed by war with the Dutch (Anonymous 1998).

In 1693, the Portuguese decided that Palmares and Zumbí were too much of a threat and they began a two year campaign against the *quilombo* that

culminated in Zumbi's death on November 20, 1695. After his capture, the Portuguese beheaded him and took his head to Recife, where it was displayed to counter claims of Zumbi's immortality (Anderson 1996:563-564). Karasch attributes the Portuguese offensive to a belief that *quilombos* like Palmares represented a threat to colonial society and that their "destruction...would deter all other such attempts in the interior of Brazil" (2002:106).

In spite of the killing of Zumbi, desertions from the slave plantations surrounding Salvador were frequent. Throughout the 17th, 18th and 19th centuries, communities of runaway slaves were common throughout the captaincy of Bahia (Schwartz 1970:209). Many of these runaways found themselves living in the small communities along the São Francisco River, while others found work on the emergent cattle *fazendas* and cultivating cassava on the banks of the river (Crist 1944). The sheer size of Palmares and the influence it had on other maroon communities are two of the reasons why so much attention has been paid to this *quilombo*. From a contemporary perspective, however, Palmares has become of central importance because of the position that Zumbi dos Palmares occupies for members of Brazil's Black movements.

The Black movement in Salvador has elevated Zumbi to heroic status because he, unlike the figure of Anastácia, vociferously and fiercely fought against slavery. Anastácia's story is seen by Black movements as one which illustrates the brutality of slavery and the racism of Brazilian society, but she is not lionised as an icon of resistance—rather, as someone whose sad tale should

be taken as symbolic of all that is wrong with Brazil.

Zumbí however is constructed, essentially, as African military hero. His upbringing by the Portuguese priest, Antonio Melo, is typically ignored or skimmed over in most public accounts of his story told on Black consciousness day or in the space of the *terreiro*. Black groups commonly rewrite Zumbí's story entirely as one of an African in Brazil—not as a creolized Afro-Brazilian. Similarly, a number of scholars, most notably Freitas (1973), have contributed to the belief that Palmares was, ethnically, composed almost entirely of individuals from one area of central Africa. Anderson attributes much of the reimagining of Palmares to political and social movements in Brazil pertaining to Black society and racism:

Whatever the Central African presence in Palmares, by the second half of the seventeenth century it was clearly a multiethnic and mostly creole community...The population of Palmares in the 1670s appears to have been largely native-born and of African descent...The historiography of Palmares is necessarily elite historiography... We do not know of any surviving accounts of Palmares by Palmarinos. The record of popular oral history is scant although it certainly exists... In the absence of more information, however, it is impossible to say how much the existing works about Palmares owe to oral literature uninformed by erudite scholarship. These historiographic facts mean that nowadays activists, artists, and scholars desirous of avoiding Eurocentric accounts have had to rely on documents written by outsiders. However, I would add that the historical record offers ample evidence within a small corpus that at least suggests creole Brazilian alternatives, many ultimately of African origins. While subsequent generations have added interpretations and mythic accretions to this record, they have not necessarily contradicted the Afro-Brazilian character of the community that was Palmares. (1996:559-565)

Yet despite the scholarly work of Anderson and others, such as Karasch, Palmares has become firmly ingrained in the popular consciousness of Brazil

and in the array of key symbols employed by the Black movement. Palmres and Zumbi have also become important rallying points for fundamental changes in the way the Brazilian government deals with rural communities.

In 1988, after more than twenty years of military rule, Brazil came under the legislation of a new democratic constitution that included a clause, article 68, which granted land rights to descendants of runaway slave communities known as *quilombos*. In that same year, members of Movimento Negro Unificado (MNU), along with other Black consciousness movements, choose to boycott the centennial abolition celebrations in favour of marking a day that they felt better represented a militant and empowered opposition to slavery as opposed to grateful thanks for manumission. The 20th of November, the anniversary of Zumbi's death in 1695, became known throughout Brazil as the Day of Black Consciousness and is now the centrepiece event of an entire month devoted to Black and Afro-Brazilian issues.

For the *movimentos negros*, the new constitution meant that the descendants of the *quilombos*, many of whom still occupied the rural settlements staked out by their maroon ancestors, would finally given the right to hold title to their lands. However, after years of legal equivocating on the part of the Brazilian government, actual land titles granted have been few and far between. The problem emerged from the criteria used to define whether rural Black communities were *actually* descended from *quilombos* and not simply self-identified as such. One such community exists in the municipal district of Bom

Jesus da Lapa.

Bom Jesus da Lapa and Rio das Rãs

The town of Bom Jesus da Lapa was established in 1691 by Francisco de Mendonça Mar. As the story is told by locals, Mendonça Mar was born in Lisbon in 1657 and left for Salvador when he was 22 to undertake the job of painting the government palace in colonial Brazil's capital at the time. After finding success in Salvador, he left the city and began wandering the lands of the interior. Upon arrival at the banks of the Rio São Francisco he discovered a grotto within the *morro* or rocky outcrop that dominates the town of Bom Jesus da Lapa. Here he began a monastic life, serving a small community of religious pilgrims that grew up around his sanctuary—these included small numbers of hardscrabble settlers, local Amerindian groups looking to escape the predations of slave traders and a growing community of runaway slaves.

Now, every year, thousands of people make a pilgrimage or *romaria* to the grotto of Bom Jesus. The pilgrims come to ask for divine intervention, for healing and for miracles and will often leave bandages, crutches or prosthetics in the hopes that their devotions will help to cure a beloved family member of an ailment or disability. Consequently, thousands of crutches, walking sticks and prosthetic limbs can now be found adorning the sheer cliff faces of the *morro* near the entrance to the chapel. The grotto contains a functioning chapel with pews, altar, and electric lighting, all located within a cave replete with stalactites

that descend from the rocky ceiling and continually drip calcified water on mass-goers.

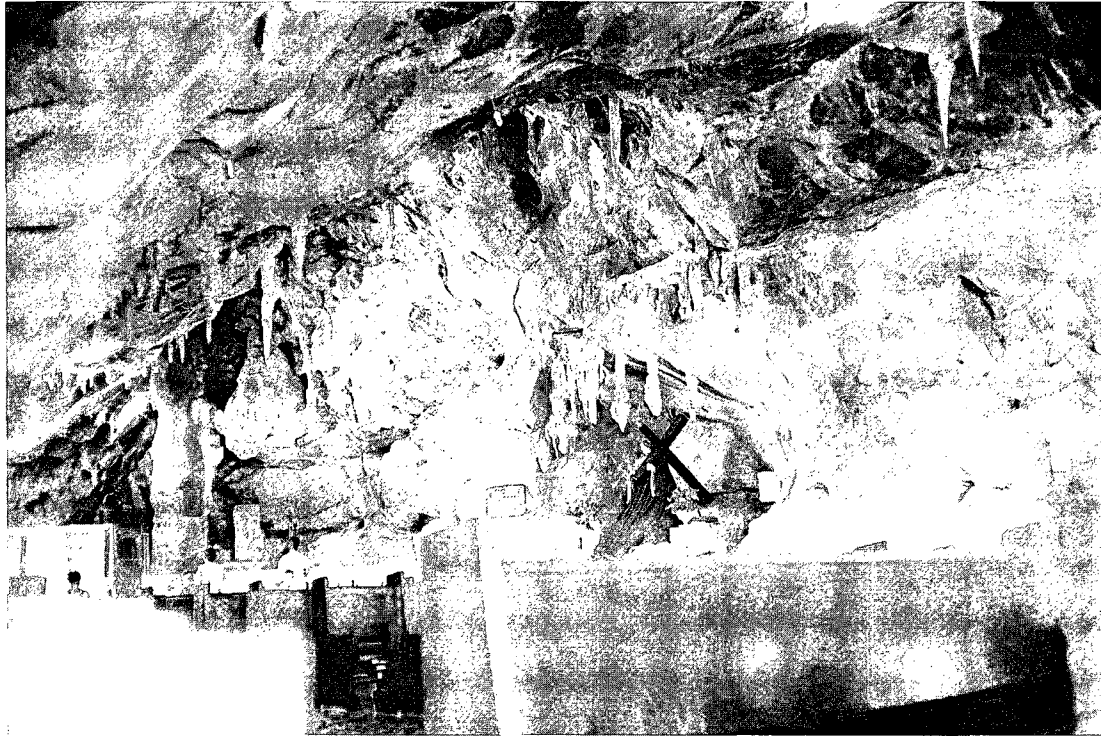


Figure 9.1 The grotto of Bom Jesus da Lapa

In the neighbourhood surrounding the grotto, a thriving cottage industry has developed in the sale of plaster effigies of Catholic saints, Maria de Soledade [Mary of Solitude, the local iteration of Nossa Senhora da Aparecida], Jesus and also *Candomblé orixás*, to be used in the pilgrim's novenas or petitions at the grotto.

Approximately eighty kilometres from and within the municipal district of the town of Bom Jesus da Lapa, on the banks of the Rio das Rãs, a tributary of the São Francisco and part of the overall São Francisco drainage system, is a small

community of farmers and herders who live in some of the most inhospitable parts of the *sertão*. While there is little archival or documentary evidence pertaining to the community's history, anthropologist Jean François Véran (2000) has conducted some of the only comprehensive ethnographic research on the area. The community is composed of four small hamlets with about 210 families that make a living, like many in the *sertão*, through cassava cultivation, small-stock holdings, labour on large *fazendas* or cattle ranches and sale of agricultural surplus. Throughout much of the 20th century, the community has been and continues to be embroiled in an ongoing cycle of violence and land wars with neighbouring *fazendeiros* [farmers or ranchers].

These four small hamlets, each composed primarily of individuals related to each other through marriage or through third or fourth level kinship attachments, are all that is left of an alleged maroon community called Mucambo (Véran 2000). The *quilombo* status of the community is a contested one as there appears to be a great deal of confusion about when members of the community of families stopped recognising themselves as an actual maroon settlement—a community formed by runaway slaves—and simply became a network of related groups living roughly in the same area of the Rio das Rãs (Véran 2000:296). Indeed, the belief that the town was in fact a *quilombo* seems to have drifted somewhat into the vague collective memory of residents and no longer appears to be a real place for many of those who call the riverine community home. Véran writes:

Muitos dos moradores dali já ouviram falar do Mucambo, porem

sem nunca lá terem estado. Para alguns, o Mucambo é o lugar onde viviam pais e avós e onde eles mesmos foram criados... Para a minoria dos idosos que lá viviam no passado, o lugar era 'tão mata que só tinha onça.' Depois chegaram os 'negros'... que viviam de 'caça e de mel'. Para as famílias nascidas nas margens do rio, o Mucambo evoca, sobretudo, a origem dos 'imbelinos'—este 'povo' com quem moram hoje—, sendo o local de onde se emigrava, em tempos de grande seca, para cultivar as terras férteis do lameiro (2000:295)

[Many of the residents had heard talk of Mucambo but none had ever been there. For some, Mucambo is a place where lived one's fathers and grandfathers. For a very few of the aged that lived in the bygone times, it was a place where the 'forest was so thick, it only held jaguars.' After the Blacks arrived, they lived on hunting and on honey. For the families born in the margins of the river, Mucambo evokes, above all the origin of the 'imbelinos'—the people who live there now and who emigrated to their current home in times of great drought to cultivate the fertile lands of the Lameiro.]⁶⁸

Mucambo itself no longer exists as a real community, and for many of the residents around the Rio das Rãs, there exists only an ambiguous social memory of the place and little concrete awareness that it may have been a refuge for escaped slaves. Access to the actual geographical location where the *quilombo* allegedly once existed has been blocked by the neighbouring *fazendeiro* for almost twenty years and consequently a whole generation of residents have no idea about the actual physical location of their supposed former home and possess only the second-hand recollections of grandparents, aunts and uncles.

However, for the militant Black movements from Salvador, many of whom are funded by Fundação Palmares and the ministry of culture, there appears to

⁶⁸ Translated by author.

be no doubt whatsoever that Mucambo was once a thriving maroon slave community. Indeed, before the word *quilombo* became the more popularly used term to describe maroon societies in Brazil, *mucambo* was the generally accepted descriptor for such a maroon community. That a settlement would take this word as its actual name is all the proof needed by many to prove the community's status.

The question of what indeed constitutes a *quilombo* has been one that has, since the drafting of the new constitution and the inclusion of article 68, continued to place the government and the Black movements in opposition. For the Black movements in Salvador, where the political solidarity of the *terreiros*, *blocos-afros* and community groups along with their academic patrons is powerful, the *quilombos* are potent symbols of militant and active Black resistance to oppression and enslavement. Consequently, there is much at stake for these groups in ensuring that "*comunidades remanescentes de quilombo*" [remnant *quilombo* communities] are guaranteed title to the land that their maroon ancestors once occupied.

The vast majority of Black *sertão* communities that have sought protection from article 68 have been ones that have long been under pressure of eviction from neighbouring landowners, typically cattle ranchers. Their closest and most vociferous allies have now become anthropologists, lawyers and other activists engaged in the Black movements of Salvador and other large Brazilian cities. The media in Brazil have grabbed hold of these stories and presented the interior

communities and their daily fight against drought, desert and debt as part of a hard-fought quest for survival by the remnants of 'African tribes' still living in the backlands of Brazil. Véran, writing in *Cultural Survival Quarterly*, notes:

Considered by the state simply as objects of the nation's cultural and historical patrimony, and presented by the mass media as authentic and archaic African tribes in the midst of contemporary Brazil, the remnant *quilombo* communities briefly mentioned in the constitution were now taking on a new shape within a modernity framed by urgent issues of rights and citizenship, cultural minorities, racism, and agrarian reform. Today, more than 700 such remnant communities have been identified throughout Brazil. About 30 have been recognized by the Ministry of Culture. Even if, so far, only a small minority have received their land titles, the ongoing process has gained a rather unexpected magnitude. (2002:20)

Ultimately, the people of Rio das Rãs, after decades of fighting a landowner without any success, came to employ the *quilombo* clause in the constitution.

Véran continues:

In 1993, after fruitless attempts to obtain legal land titles through the agrarian reform procedures, a congressman suggested that the families' defence should be organized on the grounds of the recent *quilombo* legislation... This manifesto of the local leaders of Rio das Rãs marked a significant shift in identity. The community was no longer composed of 'workers on the land' pressing for agrarian reform, but of *quilombolas* demanding the recognition of their territory. This ethnicization of the discourse coincided with a reorganization of the community around a *quilombola* association. Young politicized leaders replaced the traditional leaders. Having perfectly identified the stakes surrounding their new *quilombola* image, they quickly learned to shape it to the one produced by the distorting mirror handed them. To be visible, they had to conform. The publicity about the conflict, spread by the black movements and the progressive branch of the Catholic Church, rapidly led to an onslaught by journalists, anthropologists, college students, sightseers, and other outsiders. In Salvador, capital of the state of Bahia and cultural capital of black Brazil, events were organized in association with Afro-Brazilian carnival groups. (2002:20)

Véran suggests that few in the community understood the “*quilombo* story” and that, for the local population, what mattered was not the restoration of a Black, African or slave identity but rather an end to a land conflict that had meant ongoing harassment and eviction by rich landowners (2002:20). For the Black groups in Salvador, however, the success of the Rio das Rãs case has become a rallying cry for the continued fight to restore the African and slave past of Bahia’s Black community.

The Rio das Rãs community became symbolic of the ongoing legacy of Zumbi’s aggressive and rebellious confrontation with colonialism and slavery. Now, a whole array of anthropologists, historians, other social scientists, lawyers and NGOS, all of them funded by Fundação Palmares, are involved in fighting for the rights of settlements of what once were Black, rural peasants but that are now symbols of an African past that was lost to the wilderness in a fight for survival. Currently, a number of other predominantly Black communities in the *sertão* are still in the process of making their case for *quilombo* remnant status.

Richard Price has criticised many of the anthropological studies that first identified *quilombo* remnant communities in Brazil, asserting, in a Portuguese article, that many ethnographic accounts of rural hamlets or towns as remnant maroon settlements were overly romanticised conflations of the historical record with political agendas. Price writes:

No Brasil de hoje, em locais que foram anteriormente áreas economicamente marginais, pode-se encontrar vilarejos habitados

por afro-brasileiros, os quais são referidos tradicionalmente como comunidades negras rurais ou terras de preto. Suas origens são variadas—algumas foram formadas por escravos (ou ex-escravos), após a falência de uma fazenda ou plantação nas décadas confusas anteriores à Abolição, algumas fruto de doações de terras por senhores a ex-escravos, outras compradas por escravos libertos (que, em alguns casos, haviam comprado sua própria liberdade), outras doações de terras a escravos que haviam servido ao exército em tempo de guerra, ou ainda doações a escravos por ordens religiosas. (1999:247)

[In the Brazil of today, in locales that were previously economically marginalised areas, one can find small towns inhabited by Afro-Brazilians that are traditionally referred to as rural Black communities or Black lands. Their origins are varied, some were founded by slaves (or ex-slaves) after the failure of a farm or plantation in the confused decades after abolition, some were the fruit of donations made by landowners to former slaves, others were bought by freed slaves (who, in some cases, had bought their own freedom), others donations to slaves who had served in the army in times of war, and others still were donations to slaves from religious orders.]⁶⁹

Price then turns his attention specifically to the case of Rio das Rãs and the work of Carvalho (1996b) and Doria (1996). Carvalho, Price claims (1999:249), draws heavily on Price's own work on Saramaka maroons in Suriname, while also suggesting that a fundamental difference exists between the Saramaka and the communities of the *sertão* like Rio das Rãs. This distinction lies, according to Carvalho, in the kind of resistance offered by many of the communities of the interior like Rio das Rãs—one that consisted of a “dignified”, “democratic” and non-racially exclusive approach to their new *sertanejo* neighbours, including white farmers, Amerindian populations and other Black communities (1996b:154-

⁶⁹ Translated by author.

157). Further, Carvalho believes that these backland communities also incorporated the religious practices of their neighbours, making for more eclectic and diverse forms of *Candomblé* and other forms not found in Salvador.

Carvalho's work provides an explanation, essentially, for why these maroon communities lost their African practices. His assertion is curiously dissonant with an evocation of Price's work on Saramaka maroons. Those communities of the Suriname bush, released from the torturous life of the plantation, were able to create rich and innovative forms of Black culture that drew upon a diversity of African traditions (Price 2002), but, similarly liberated former or escaped slaves in Brazil quickly lost or diluted, according to Carvalho, their African practices.

With an ongoing history of harassment, killing of animals, destruction of houses and of fields (Doria 1996) by a *fazendeiro*⁷⁰, Price believes many of the ethnographers and historians were motivated to become actively committed to legitimising the residents of Rio das Rãs' legal claims. He believes that the research carried out by Carvalho and Doria was of very short duration, unlike that conducted by himself and other scholars of maroon societies, and lacks the kind of detailed oral testimony and "ethnographic texture" that any study of a community whose origins are uncertain would require (1999:251-253). This is particularly problematic, believes Price, when not one member of the community

⁷⁰ Incidentally, this *fazendeiro* had received money from the Interamerican Development Bank for protection of these very lands (Carvalho 1996a:428)

can remember any story about the founding of their settlement beyond the generation of their grandparents and when those stories appear to be, in part, directed and biased by the interview techniques of the researchers (1999:253). This bias needs to be understood in the context of what the idea of *quilombo* now means for the Black movements in Salvador and elsewhere in Brazil.

From the music of Gilberto Gil and Caetano Veloso, to films about Palmares like *Quilombo* (1984) by Carlos Diegues, to stores and restaurants in Salvador that incorporate the word into their names, even to attempts to recognise Pelourinho as a maroon remnant community, *quilombo* as an idea, carries almost as much symbolic clout for the Black movements as do concepts such as *Candomblé* and *orixás*. The *quilombo* has become one of the key symbols mobilised by groups such as Ilê Aiyê and the *terreiros*. It represents a social and military analog to the kind of resistance offered by the religious centres of Salvador and valorisation of this maroon space—not just in Brazil, but throughout the Black American world—and forms an important part of the Africanised identity they wish to activate.

The ‘weight’ that the Black movements attach to the resuscitation of the *quilombo* has been discussed extensively by venerated Rio de Janeiro-based Black activist, Abdias do Nascimento (1980). Writing from a distinctively Afrocentric perspective that even goes so far as to suggest that Africa had contact with the Americas prior to the arrival of Columbus (1980:147), Do Nascimento suggests that:

Quilomboist society represents an advanced stage in socio-political and human progress in terms of economic egalitarianism.... Quilomboismo has meant the adaptation of African traditions of communitarianism...to the Brazilian environment...The Quilombos of the 16th, 17th, 18th and 19th centuries left us a patrimony of *Quilomboist* practice. It is for the Black people of today to sustain and amplify the Afro-Brazilian culture of resistance and affirmation of our truth. (1980:161)

On the one hand, then, we have the assertion from anthropologists such as Carvalho that the *quilombos* represent a kind of resistance to slavery that is unlike that of the Suriname or Jamaica maroons but also one whose African traditions have been lost to oblivion and need to be restored. Abdias do Nascimento and other activists, on the other hand, suggests that *quilombos* are far more than just remnant communities—they represent a way of life, an African communal way of life that all Black Brazilians must rediscover as an alternative to the status quo of Brazilian racial oppression.

Even Price, despite his misgivings about some of the research conducted in the area of Rio das Rãs and other alleged *quilombo* remnants, suggests that obtaining title to these lands is vital for both residents and for the Black movement:

Os antropólogos brasileiros continuam a assumir um importante papel auxiliar na atual criação de neo-quilombos, um papel que cresce, in, em parte, a suas lutas recentes em favor das populações indígenas e que é parcialmente paralelo ao de antropólogos dos Estados Unidos e do Canadá de uma ou duas décadas atrás, na redefinição do que significava ser membro de uma tribo indígena reconhecida federalmente...Os quilombos da era da escravidão do Brasil possuem histórias heróicas de resistência, ainda que hoje elas estejam, em sua maior parte, perdidas nas sombras... Com o apoio atual de antropólogos e de

grupos de ação política, há hoje — graças ao Art. 68 e seus defensores — pelo menos a promessa de melhores dias para as comunidades remanescentes do Brasil. (1999:260-262)

[Brazilian anthropologists continue to assume an important role in aiding the actual creation of neo-*quilombos*, a role that has grown, in part, because of recent challenges in favour of indigenous populations that parallels American and Canadian anthropologists helping to redefine, in the past two decades, the significance of membership in indigenous 'tribes' at the federal level. Maroon communities from the era of slavery in Brazil had heroic stories of resistance, although today many of them are lost to the past...With the support of anthropologists and groups of political action, there exists today—thanks to article 68 and its defenders—the promise of better days for the remainder communities of Brazil]⁷¹

Here, Price offers emphatic support for the work of anthropologists in Brazil, many of whom are in Salvador and are part of CEAO, working to help secure land title for Black communities that may be remnants of former maroon settlements. Indeed, Price has, along with Mintz, been very much responsible for helping to define what exactly composes a maroon society in the Americas. However, he is extremely cautious about the political agendas of some anthropologists who wish to secure title for rural Black communities in Brazil using article 68 when, in many cases, it simply doesn't apply.

For the residents of Rio das Rãs and for the activists from Fundação Palmares, the use of article 68 has been, for both communities, an extremely convenient and fortuitous marriage of intentions. Rio das Rãs inhabitants have finally found a successful legal avenue to achieve their legal claims and the Black

⁷¹ Translated by author.

movements have gained added symbolic collateral for their assertions that Bahia's interior is full of the remnants of escaped slave societies. Although Rio das Rãs residents have won a first victory against the *fazendeiro* through the use of article 68, the legitimacy of many rural community's status as *quilombo* remnants remain uncertain as cases still wend their way through the Brazilian court. Furthermore, as of March 2008, the Brazilian government placed a temporary suspension on all *quilombo* clause cases currently before the courts, requiring that an "absolute majority" of residents in the settlement agree to the petition (Scolese 2008).

Now to be sure, it is quite likely that many of the settlements in the *sertão* contain the descendants of slaves that made their way into this part of the interior in search of a better life, of a new homestead, because of land donations, or for any of the host of reasons suggested by Price. However, whether or not they are the descendants of a community of slaves who came to *sertão* to escape and resist enslavement remain less than certain.

But does it really matter? Most communities in the *sertão* are marginalised, impoverished settlements of people, many of whom are likely of slave descent. Should their status as individuals who might be eligible for land rights hinge upon whether or not their ancestors actively rebelled against enslavement to form a new society in the wilderness? Certainly, there are a host of legal implications to be considered. If Rio das Rãs were merely a community of Black rural peasants descended generically from slaves who formed a new settlement on the

periphery Brazilian society and then granted land title, would that imply that all communities of predominantly Black Brazilians should be entitled to government guaranteed land title? Further, if one adheres to the belief that *all* Brazilians are indeed descended in some way or another from a mixture of slave, indigenous and European origins, should not all communities be granted similar title? Clearly, for this legislation to work the definition and the criteria used to circumscribe what counts as a *quilombo* must be, as Price suggests, precise. Does Rio das Rãs qualify? It is not entirely certain. But I return to my original question—does it really matter?

Contained in the legal arguments over the definition of a maroon remainder community are shades of the same debate that I address in chapter 3—the ‘true’ ethnic composition of African societies in the slave plantation. As I have reiterated throughout the present work, my goal is not to try and contribute to this debate. Rather, my intent is, within the context of this debate and within the ethnic process of creolisation, to try and understand how an Africanised idea of what it means to be Black in Brazil is used and manipulated in order to mobilise the Afro-Brazilian community in Brazil and specifically in Bahia. This same approach to understanding Black identity can also be located within the confines of the *quilombo* debate. Indeed, many of the players and stakeholders are the same, including: anthropologists and academics who are committed advocates of the Black community; *terreiros*, *blocos-afros* and other associations within Salvador’s Black movement who actively support the granting of *quilombo* status

to a wide range of rural Black communities; government agencies such as the ministry of culture and Fundação Palmares; and finally, a community of predominantly Black individuals in which there is mixed and sometimes ambivalent support for such identity oriented initiatives.

For the purposes of a study that seeks to understand how concepts such as 'slave', 'Africa' and also 'maroon' or '*quilombo*' are used in Brazil, the 'truth' of the settlement's origins are not particularly relevant. But even from this perspective, one of discourse and dialogue, the answer to my question is that, yes, it does matter—for some stakeholders. Debates about the ethnic form of plantation are, ultimately, futile, as the historical record is simply insufficient to accurately determine the percentages of African ethnic groups. However, *Quilombo* remnant communities do exist today—they are living, breathing societies that are part of the ethnic landscape of the *sertão*, and determining their origins entails powerful repercussions for the Black movement and for the residents of these communities.

For Black groups in Salvador and for agencies like Fundação Palmares, identifying communities such as Rio das Rãs as *quilombos* contributes significantly to the symbolic capital they accrue by fighting on the side of a people that, historically, also fought against slavery and racism. For the government and for state agencies it is vitally important to ascertain a plaintiff community's origins in order to prevent a free-for-all in terms of land claims.

Blackness in the *Sertão*

In the town of Bom Jesus da Lapa, there appears to be general acceptance that the community of Rio das Rãs are descendants of an ancient *quilombo*. People in Bom Jesus da Lapa with whom I spoke are aware of the community, are familiar with the legal issues pertaining to the community's status and have much to say about the aid supplied by Black organisations from Salvador, about Black society in the interior and about the history of slavery in the *sertão*.

However, before I turn to these individuals, I wish to return briefly to the city of Salvador. In interviews conducted with members of the *blocos-afros* in Salvador about people of the *sertão* and specifically about the town of Bom Jesus da Lapa, two dominant themes emerged. Whenever I introduced the topic of this small town, responses focused on the Catholic pilgrimages made to the grotto and the battle to obtain legal status for Rio das Rãs. I recount here an interview with Marcelo, a 45-year old man from the town of Jacobina and a member of Ilê Aiyê whom I met in the famed Pelourinho *cachaça* bar 'O Cravinho':

AD: Marcelo, you're from the interior. Tell me about Bom Jesus da Lapa. I'm going there in a week or so.⁷²

Marcelo: You know, Bom Jesus is famous all around Brazil, because of the chapel and grotto inside the *morro*. They say it has

⁷² Interview with Marcelo, Pelourinho, Salvador, Bahia, Brazil, December 2005. Conversation format of this interview does not facilitate presentation of original Portuguese

healing powers. I don't disbelieve such things, but I don't put much stock in them either. Ilê Aiyê is also a sponsor of a *quilombo* out there. It's called Rio das Rãs and it is just outside of Bom Jesus da Lapa. They are the descendants of slaves who fought against the slaveowners and ran away to the interior. Now, with the new constitution, we've been assisting them to get title for their land. During the last *dia da consciência negra*, we had tee-shirts that said Rio das Rãs and we contributed some of the profits to the community's defence.

AD: What do you think of article 68 and the so-called *quilombos* in the *sertão*?

Marcelo: Why do you say 'so-called?' The *quilombos* are like Pelourinho, they are places of resistance. They practice *Candomblé* like us, some of them still have some African words in how they speak Portuguese, more than we do, I think...But towns like Bom Jesus are totally Christianised and agricultural. Everyone out there listens to *forro* [Brazilian country music] and works on the *fazendas*. The life is hard out there, I know this, but the Blacks in heavily Christianised towns like Bom Jesus, where the Catholic Church is so powerful, they've forgotten their Black traditions, their African traditions—not like us in Salvador. Some of them do practice *Candomblé* in towns like that, but it is polluted and more like *Umbanda* now than real *Candomblé*. They have what we call *Candomblé de Caboclos* which is like our religion but with the *caboclo* spirits that *Umbanda* has. It is like they have forgotten their African heritage even more than people here in Salvador. Here in this city, we have so many reminders, in our food, in our music, our religion. But out there, they have lost their African practices.

Militant members of Black organisations in Salvador like Marcelo often regard the 'Black' citizenry of the *sertão*, who are not actively involved in radicalising their communities against white oppression, as not 'Black' enough. This sentiment is echoed by Abdias do Nascimento: "Each and every Black or mulatto who accepts 'racial democracy' as a reality, and miscegenation in the form it takes today as a positive phenomenon, is a traitor to himself and considers himself inferior" (1980:167).

Many Black leaders in Salvador also regard the residents of the Bahian backcountry as somewhat religious apostates. There are forms of *Candomblé* that are widely practiced in the towns of the *sertão*, but for the most part they are far more ‘heterodox’ forms of the *orixá* tradition than the kind practiced and promoted by the powerful *terreiros* in Salvador such as Opô Afonjá and Casa Branca. The *Candomblé* found in the *sertão* does worship the *orixás* of the Yoruba but also includes other deities such as Amerindian spirits.

These heterodox forms include the *Candomblé de Caboclos* mentioned by Marcelo, another *orixá* tradition called *Jarê*⁷³, along with actual *Umbanda* and spiritist centres. These alternatives to so-called ‘pure’ *Candomblé* place the spirits of the forest and those of Amerindian warriors in the *orixá* pantheon alongside those of Yoruba deities. To the famous and affluent leaders of *terreiros* in Salvador such as Ilê Axé Opô Afonjá, this is a heresy which, in the words of one devotee—and those of Matory (2005:165)—“dilutes” the most purely African religion of Brazil—*Candomblé*⁷⁴.

However, there exists a very different perspective in the towns of the *sertão* like Bom Jesus da Lapa about the place of Black activist groups such as

⁷³ *Jarê* is a form of Afro-Brazilian *orixá* religious practice that includes the veneration of Amerindian deities. *Jarê*’s ritual style, Senna asserts, speaks more to the rough and hardscrabble life of the interior in that it elevates the Indian or *caboclo* spirits to the same level as African spirits (1984, 2004).

⁷⁴ Interview with Raimundo in Curuzu-Liberdade. Salvador, Bahia, Brazil, April 2005.

movimento negro, the *Candomblé terreiros*, and *blocos-afros* in the fight against racism in Brazil. In Bom Jesus da Lapa and other small towns of the Bahian interior, there grows a palpable cynicism among individuals who are visibly *Afro-Brasileiro* towards the work of Black activists in Salvador. Also, the enthusiasm with which government agencies such as the ministries of culture, tourism, education and others have engaged the agenda of the Black movements is also eyed with considerable scepticism. This antipathy seems to go beyond the usual suspicion of elites in the city—Black or white—and government representatives found in rural areas. Residents of Bom Jesus da Lapa, on the whole, do not seem interested in engaging in identity-based discussions of Blackness, let alone African-oriented ideas of Blackness, despite the fact that a symbolic focal point for this discourse—the *quilombo* remnant community of Rio das Rãs—is, quite literally, right in their backyard.

Large numbers of individuals in this part of Bahia believe that many Black leaders in Salvador are simply lining their pockets with talk about Bahia's place as a nexus for Brazil's '*patrimônio negro*'—Black heritage. A profound difference exists in the ways in which rural Bahians construct ethnic categories such as Black and Afro-Brazilian and in the ways in which the slave past is used to talk about social conditions in the present. In nearly all of my interviews with residents of Bom Jesus da Lapa, individuals identified themselves as Brazilians and *Sertanejos*—people of the *sertão*.

Most informants that I spoke to in Bom Jesus da Lapa were perfectly willing

to identify themselves as possessing some degree or another of Afro-Brazilian heritage, except for a few wealthy and affluent hotel managers, restaurateurs and visiting engineers. But the language they used was subtle and carefully chosen. Very few seemed willing to outrightly use the word *negro* to describe their Black skin colour and most resorted to the term *preto* or *morena* to describe their Blackness.

Indeed, throughout my time in Bom Jesus da Lapa, only one informant seemed to articulate the philosophy of the Black movements of Salvador. He was a young man who worked in one of the stores that sells religious effigies made for petitions and veneration at the grotto. He had spent six months living in Salvador with an aunt in Curuzu-Liberdade, where he had started attending a *terreiro* and occasionally visiting Ilê Aiyê. He said he was forced to come back to Bom Jesus da Lapa because his family's business—the *artigos religiosos* shop—was floundering and his father needed help. However, he informed me that he views the *sertão* differently now. He believes that the interior is a place where slaves fled in order to escape the hardship of the plantation even though they knew that life in this part of Brazil would be different. He believes that all residents of Bom Jesus da Lapa and of the *sertão* in general are, in some way, descended from the slaves that came to the interior. In his words: "*Todos os sertanejos são negros*"⁷⁵ [All people of the *sertão* are Black].

⁷⁵ Interview with Carlos. Bom Jesus da Lapa, Bahia, Brazil, January 2006.

These are not sentiments shared by most informants. Indeed, most individuals who chose to identify themselves ethnically did so as either *pretos* or *morenas* or simply as *Afro-Brasileiro*⁷⁶. Most individuals with whom I spoke saw their hard life in the interior not as a product of racism and prejudice towards Black culture but rather as a consequence of the deeply entrenched class divisions in rural Brazilian society and because they didn't own any land—very few people in either the town of Bom Jesus da Lapa or in the surrounding rural environs own title to the land on which they live. Most of them pay rent to a landlord or *patrão* [patron] or to a local *fazendeiro*.

Indeed, the long-running fight over the land occupied by the residents of Rio das Rãs did not become truly racialised until the introduction of article 68 in the new constitution and the activation of the Black movement for the settlement's claims. Prior to this, throughout most of the 20th century, the struggle was one between a wealthy landowner and a group of landless peasants—a scenario that is played out again and again, from the southern *gaúcho* lands of Paraná to the Amazon basin. Ultimately, I believe that it is through class, not race that most Black Brazilians in interior towns like Bom Jesus da Lapa understand and talk about their lot in life. One such individual is Edson dos Santos Ferreira.

⁷⁶ These self-identified characteristics were provided in response to the question “How would you describe your racial background?”

Edson, Carlos and Antônio

Edson makes *jenipapo* in a small shed behind his home. It is seasonal country liquor, common in the interior of Bahia, made from macerating the jenipapo fruit with *cachaça*, Brazil's homegrown form of sugarcane spirit. Edson has a small grove of jenipapo trees surrounding his two-room, zinc roofed house on the outskirts of Bom Jesus da Lapa. I met Edson in search of a bottle of Jenipapo to take back to a friend in Salvador. When I first arrived in town, I was told that it was not the Jenipapo season and that I would have a hard time finding a bottle. Finally, though, I encountered Edson who made the liquor each year and still had some bottles left from the previous season. He told me that it wouldn't taste as good as it had been sitting for too long, but I bought them regardless and asked if I might stay and chat for awhile.

Selling this sweet spirit is only one of the many trades that Edson plies in order to make ends meet in the dry, hot and hard climate of Bahia's interior. He has worked for a mobile phone company, assisting in the erection of signal towers, as a policeman, as a bus driver and, each year, as a ranch hand on a nearby *fazenda*. Edson is married with two children and is every bit the typical *sertanejo*. We start talking about how people in Salvador view the sertão and people of the interior:

Salvador era o capital antigo do Brasil na época colonial e agora, é uma cidade grande no contexto do Brasil contemporâneo. Mas, eu lhe digo, Baianos em Salvador sabem nada sobre a vida no interior, a vida do interior é muito difícil...a terra não tem água

*bastante e agora, os oficiais no Salvador e Brasília querem transpor as águas do rio São Francisco. Porque isso, a gente aqui não tem o tempo a participar nos movimentos do Salvador sobre racismo, sobre nosso patrimônio negro e todo isso. Sim, racismo existe no Brasil, mas não temos o tempo a falar sobre negritude e afro-descendente. Salvador esta desconectada da vida do interior.*⁷⁷

[Salvador used to be the capital of Brazil in the colonial period and today, it is one of contemporary Brazil's great cities. But, I say to you, Bahians in Salvador know nothing about the life of the interior, life in the interior is very hard...the land doesn't have enough water and now the officials in Salvador and Brasilia want to change the path of the San Francisco River. Because of this, the people here don't have the time to participate in the movements of Salvador about racism, about our Black heritage and all this stuff. Yes, racism exists in Brazil, but we don't have the time to talk about Blackness and African descent. Salvador is disconnected from the life of the interior.]

I told Edson that he was forgetting the staunch defence of many of the *quilombo* remnant communities in the interior and that many of the *terreiros*, *blocos-afros* and other Black political organisations were fighting for the rights of these rural communities. He admits that such movements are good and helpful to many of the poor Black communities in the *sertão*. But he asks plaintively, 'what about me?' He claims that he too has Afro-Brazilian ancestry, that one of his grandparents came from the Rio das Rãs area and so he too is a descendant of slaves. This should mean, Edson believes, that he should also enjoy title to land. But his situation, he tells me, does not fit within the parameters of what others have determined defines a *quilombola*—a descendent of maroons.

⁷⁷ Interview with Edson dos Santos Ferreira about the Black community movements of Salvador. Bom Jesus da Lapa, Bahia, Brazil, February 2006.

Edson tells me that he knows many residents of Rio das Rãs and has worked with them on the cattle ranch: "*Vá! vá e ver a pele deles. Tem a mesma cor que minha. Ainda, os grupos do Salvador estão lutando por suas direitas e não pelas minhas.*" [Go! Go and see their skin. It is the same colour as mine. Yet, the groups from Salvador are fighting for their rights and not for mine]. Further, he believes that many of the residents of Rio das Rãs are not committed to the same agenda as their supporters in Salvador but, in his words, "mimic" the language of the lawyers and anthropologists. He doesn't blame them for this, indeed, he tells me he would do the same if he was in their position, but he also doesn't believe it is fair.

Edson suspects that the Black movements are using the people of Rio das Rãs more than the residents of that community are using the movements. He believes that, ultimately, the groups in Salvador will get more out of the deal and that, ultimately, even if the residents get their land title, they will still be harassed by the *fazendeiro*: "*Eu conheço esse cara... Você não pode confiar nele. Ele vai os atacar com ou sem um título de propriedade*" [I know that guy... You can't trust him. He will attack them with or without a land title.]

Edson believes that if his ancestors had stayed out on some rural settlement, instead of coming into the town of Bom Jesus da Lapa, then he too could have had access to land. As it is, he is forced to rent a plot of land from a *patrão* to keep his small herd of goats. Life is hard for him and for many of his fellows and he tells me that his wife is always urging him to pack up and move to

Rio de Janeiro with his family. The swollen mega-cities of the Southeast, Salvador and even Brasilia offer many advantages to life in the *sertão*, both real and illusory, and migration from the interior to these centres has continued unabated through the 20th century and into the 21st century.

However, the reason why Edson and so many others have not abandoned this country in favour of a life in Salvador or Rio or São Paulo has much to do with a belief common to many *sertanejos*: that they can make it in the *sertão*, if they work hard enough. To be sure, money and opportunity are also impediments to escape from life in the Brazilian outback, but many, like Edson, want to stay:

Com certeza, a vida no sertão é difícil. Mas, eu não podia sobreviver numa cidade como Salvador. Pelo menos, essa casa pertence a mim, mais ou menos, Estas cabras são minhas..mais ou menos! A problema é a sociedade brasileira não tem respeito pra a gente sertanejo e a historia de nosso país. A historia de sertão é a historia do Brasil.

[Sure, life in the *sertão* is difficult. But, I couldn't survive in a city like Salvador. At least, this house belongs to me, more or less...these goats are mine, more or less! The problem is that Brazilian society has no respect for the people of the *sertão* and the history of our country. The history of the *sertão* is the history of Brazil.]

After spending some time in the company of Edson, I feel that we have developed a sufficient rapport to broach a particularly sensitive subject. The category of *negro* has long been considered something of a slur in the interior—used primarily as a pejorative for truly down and out individuals who were clearly of Afro-Brazilian background and so I wanted to wait a little while before touching on the subject. One evening, on the main town square, Edson invited two of his

work-mates to join us for dinner and we talked about this word and what it means to *sertanejos*.

AD: Walking around, talking to people in Bom Jesus da Lapa, people don't use the word *negro* to describe themselves. In Salvador you hear it all the time. One hears it on the streets, at public demonstrations, scrawled on the wall as graffiti. But here is absent. Why do you think this is so? ⁷⁸

Edson: Look, this is a Brazilian town. We are Brazilians. This is also Bahia and we are proud to be Bahian. Like the people who live in Salvador, we are not blind to Brazil's racism. But we have other concerns out here. Concerns that people in Salvador don't understand. Out here, *negro* was not a word you used to describe someone and it is still considered rude. When people say it, they spit it out '*Porra, negro!*' [*Porra* is common multipurpose Bahian slang]. I think that the people in Rio das Rãs have embraced the word because it helps them politically.

French's work on another *quilombo* community along the Rio São Francisco in Bahia would seem to parallel Edson's assertion. He writes that members of this community willingly took on the "much-derided" category of *negro* and its concomitant associations of "oppression and slavery" because it meant that they would be able to gain title to their land. Adopting this category implied a restructuring of the founding myths of the community to include—with the aid of anthropologists from Fundação Palmares—flight from slavery, although prior to the claim for *quilombo* status no such story or narrative had existed (French 2006:345-350). The founding story is now acted out twice a year on special occasions and, according to French (2006:353), represents a public performance

⁷⁸ Interview with Edson, Carlos and Antônio ,Bom Jesus da Lapa, Bahia, Brazil, February 2006. Conversation format of this interview does not facilitate presentation of original Portuguese

of social categories that causes participants and observers alike to ritualise and talk about a new ethnic identity.

Antônio: It is true. My family also comes from a small rural community just north of Bom Jesus da Lapa. We were mostly what people in Brazil would call *preto*, and I heard stories when I was a child that former slaves founded our town or sometimes that we were taken in by the indigenous people. We had some people who practiced *Candomblé de caboclos*, but we didn't talk about these things. It was just a vague notion that used to be mentioned now and again. I think part of the reason why so many small communities in the interior look to Salvador for help is because they see the success that some Amazonian groups have had in land claims and want the same. If all they have to do is call themselves *negro* and talk about slavery, then why not?

AD: Do you think that your home village will do this?

Antônio: No, I don't think so. Like I said, this was only a rumour. We have no proof. I think Rio das Rãs had proof and some historian came from Salvador, from UFBa I think, and proved that they were *quilombolas*.

Edson: But those historians work for Ilê Aiyê and Palmares and Gilberto Gil's culture ministry...they have an agenda. They want to prove that these settlements were *quilombos*. Don't you see that?

Antônio: Well, I am not so cynical. I think that they wouldn't lie about such things. If they are *quilombolas*, then I say let them have the land. It doesn't matter. They'll have a hard time wresting it from that *fazendeiro*.

Carlos: But that is not the point. Look, all of us sitting here have *sangue preto* [Black blood]. Where do you think it came from? Just because some slaves fought slavery and others didn't, does that mean we are not entitled to land. In that sense, all Brazilians are victims of slavery.

AD: What do you mean by that?

Carlos: Look at my skin, it is darker than yours, but lighter than Edson's. Antônio has the darkest skin of all. What am I to do? Say that his home town is a *quilombo* and mine isn't? That he has rights

to his land, but in my community it is OK if the landlord burns out my mother and father, uncles and aunts, cousins and friends. Listen I don't want to be *negro*, *preto*, *quilombola*, whatever! I just want my rights as a citizen of this country. You know, something binds all Brazilians. All Brazilians speak Portuguese. I don't care what those people in Salvador say...learning an African language and worshipping Xangô is not going to help me.

AD: But saying they are *negro* has helped the people of Rio das Rãs, no?

Carlos: We'll see. They have nothing yet and are still harassed. But the anthropologists like you and those at Palmares have made names for themselves.

Carlos is the most cynical and sceptical informant that I interviewed in Bom Jesus da Lapa. He is scornful of the Black movements and seems to be quite hostile to any suggestion that he should call himself *negro*. But contained in Edson's, Carlos' and Antônio's words and in the responses of many whom I spoke to in Bom Jesus da Lapa are, in some small measure, the last hurrahs of 'racial democracy' as an ideology in Brazil.

The ideology itself has been torn apart and decimated over the last few decades—in no small measure thanks to the efforts of Brazilian anthropologists and sociologists, affirmative action in governmental hiring and post-secondary education designed to combat racial discrimination that 'never really existed', and by the vigorous Black movements in Salvador and Rio de Janeiro (Sheriff 2001). For these three men and for many individuals like them in towns like Bom Jesus da Lapa, racial categories and ethnic identities that correspond to an idealised image of Blackness and Africanity do not appear to be viable options. Instead, they appear content to identify their ethnic origins within the limits laid down

within the ideology of 'racial democracy'. They are aware of their *mestiço* descent and the likely predominance of African slave ancestors in their background but chose not emphasise such elements. Rather, they adhere to the belief that they are as Brazilian as anybody else, more so in fact, as they openly reject the racialised language of the Black movements.

As to racism, they believe it exists, but not to the same degree that it does in the big cities of Brazil. All three of these men, if they were placed on a street in Chicago, New York, Toronto, London, Kingston or Cape Town would likely be categorised, quickly and without hesitation, as Black. But in Brazil's interior, in the midst of a debate about the veracity of slave origins for neighbouring remnant maroon communities, they are able to engage in discourse about the relative benefits and pitfalls of accepting that very category as a personal and ethnic identity for themselves and for those whom they reckon as family and community.

Ultimately though, both Edson and Antônio admitted to me that if they could somehow appeal to the *quilombo* clause and get land title for their families in their home communities they would happily do so—even if it meant self identifying as *negro*. Carlos however, asserted that he would never do such a thing, that he was a Brazilian, "*primeiro e ultimo*" [first and last].

But at the intersection of these men's remarks lies more than just the rote recitation of the precepts of racial democracy. There also exists a clear idea about *sertão* and peasant identity and the curious dual nature of *quilombos* as

communities that have lost their African heritage but that are also—for Salvador's Black movements—emblematic of this heritage. Karina Baptista (2003), as part of an oral history project, has covered some similar terrain with her informants. Like Edson, Carlos and Antônio, her interviewees seemed reluctant to broach the topic of racial identity, instead asserting that they were merely peasants. Baptista, however, concludes that Black or indeed ethnic identity of any sort had become diminished because of a lack of contact with "African" practices and so, consequently, a peasant identity became the principal identifier for the social group and informants fell back on the ideology of 'racial democracy' (2003:13-14).

The reduction of peasant or *sertão* identity to merely an articulation of the 'myth' of racial democracy does the logically reasoned and well-thought arguments of men like Edson, Antônio and especially Carlos a great injustice. To assert that they are just 'falling back' on the ideology of 'racial democracy' or to accuse them, as Abdias do Nascimento might, of being "traitors" is to miss the point that the life of a rural peasant most accurately defines—at the level of collective identity—who these men are. In the daily workaday lives of these men and thousands of other men and women like them in the interior, the hard labour and scorched environment that defines their lives are not confined to people who, for all intents and purposes, look like them. All, not just those who obviously possess some degree of slave heritage, must confront the adversities of the interior and peasant identity is not something that these individuals have resorted

to because of a lack of Black or African cultural practices.

Edson does not define himself as a *sertanejo* merely because he is apprehensive of racial definitions such as *negro* or even *quilombola* and its concomitant slave associations. He and his fellows do so because the *life* of a rural peasant is one that best defines who they are and what they do. The sphere of social action and interaction within which these individuals dwell is one in which ethnic categories such as Black and white or European and African have little relevance.

Further, there exists little real difference in the daily lives of people who live in communities like Rio das Rãs and those who live in other rural settings on the outskirts of Bom Jesus da Lapa: they farm the same crops—cassava and maize and they all keep small stock such as goats, sheep and poultry. From a religious perspective, members of Rio das Rãs have also not completely adopted the spiritual orthodoxy of Salvador's Black movement—*Candomblé*. Edson tells me that he knows a number of people from Rio das Rãs who occasionally attend, along with him, the congregation hall of the *Primeira Igreja Batista* [First Baptist Church] in the centre of Bom Jesus da Lapa and knows others in the community who are Catholics and others who are evangelicals: "*Simplesmente porque eles aceitam a palavra "negro", você acha de que eles já esqueceram do Catolicismo? A gente está no Brasil!*" [Simply because they accept the word "negro", you think they just forget Catholicism? We are in Brazil!]

Finally, and perhaps most importantly, the people of Rio das Rãs and Bom Jesus da Lapa are descended from the same people—a mixture of former slaves, Amerindian groups drawn into the social sphere of backland settlements and white farmers. What truly makes one a *quilombola* and the other a rural peasant when members of the maroon community themselves are unsure of their origins and require the category of ‘*negro*’ to be imposed upon them from without?

Creolisation and the Folklorisation of Blackness in the Sertão

The residents of Rio das Rãs, through their use of the *quilombo* clause in the new constitution, have begun to reinvent themselves not only in the context of, as French puts it, “representations of an imagined African past” (2006:341). They have also, through their associations with academic and legal interlocutors from Salvador, associated themselves with the representatives, inventors and agents of that imagined past.

It is indeed an irony that a maroon remnant community should need the aid of anthropologists and attorneys to ‘remember’ Africa. Maroons, assert Price and Price (1997), are most representative of creolization not because they have ‘forgotten’ Africa, but rather because within these communities diverse African traditions truly came to the forefront, without a European voice imposed upon the dialogue. Without the overpowering authority of a European linguistic and cultural trope intruding in quotidian life, the African practices and traditions different

cultures could find new ways to interact, co-exist, cross-pollinate and co-mingle. In this setting, then, the maroon becomes perhaps the most fully creolised in that no one voice of the 'Old World' takes precedence, no particular European language, cultural practice or religious form dominates the process of ethnogenesis. Yet maroon communities 'remember' the African past, not as intact or replicated cultural forms, but in eclectic and sophisticated ways that invoke multiple African histories and multiplex African identities (Price 2008)—not at all like the ethnically monolithic assertions of Yoruba or Asante origin found in many militant Black movements in Brazil and the United States.

That the 'true' histories of these communities may have been lost due to the vicissitudes of time, oppression, eviction, harassment and the hard-fought life of the interior is perfectly reasonable. But it is strange turnaround indeed that the agencies and stakeholders responsible for helping to recover and, for some groups, reimagine, their 'African' heritage also articulate, within the context of Salvador and its Black movements, the belief that Black communities were never, in fact, creolised and maintained their 'proud' Yoruba origins throughout the colonial era.

Allow me then to play historian-detective in the present work for just a page or two. Let us accept then that at least some of the communities of the interior founded during the years of slavery were indeed formed by bands of runaway slaves—maroons. Let us also accept that, in the years after abolition in Brazil, many other similar rural communities were formed due to land donations, labour

migration and settlement around important Catholic pilgrimage sites such as Bom Jesus da Lapa. Finally, let us also accept that many of these communities held numbers of impoverished Europeans and Amerindians who had come to find work on the growing estates of rich landlords. In the context of this creolised milieu, is it not understandable that any African culture, traditions or practices that might have been a part of those maroon societies gave way to a broader and more unified idea of shared *sertão* identity? French writes:

At many identified *quilombo* sites, investigators could find evidence only of communal land cultivation, memories of having lived in the same location for multiple generations, and typical backland practices rooted in Iberian folk Catholicism with the addition of music and dance influenced by the indigenous and African background of almost all backlands residents. (2006:343)

As Baptista puts it, *Sertão* or peasant identity may not have diminished African identities because such categories had no cultural reservoir upon which to draw. Rather, the nature of maroon societies, formed as they often are of *diverse* African practices, may have encouraged precisely the kind of cross-cultural borrowing and mingling that defines the culture and populace of the *sertão*.

Schwartz (1970:216), in his discussion of *quilombos* throughout Bahia found in Price's edited volume *Maroon Societies*, notes that there are many instances of joint Afro-Amerindian resistance to slavery and to colonial rule and that intermarriage between African and Amerindian slaves was not uncommon. This is important to note as it reminds us that those slaves who did escape to form

quilombos may have already been exposed—as Zumbí was—to processes of creolisation prior to escape into the backlands and that Amerindians were likely crucial allies during those early days of community formation in some of Brazil's harshest environments.

I am not suggesting views held by Edson and his comrades are not, in some small way, indebted to the dominant assimilationist ideologies of Brazil. However, they are also part of the cultural and identitarian worldview of the *sertão*. This worldview was built not on the nationalist writings of Freyre or the pseudoscientific ponderings of Da Cunha, but was born out of a past in which new ethnic identities were generated and mobilised within the frameworks provided by previous social categories and past experience.

Hanchard (1994:164) believes that attempts to sacralise and elevate the *quilombos*—along with the space of the *terreiro*—as representative of bold manifestations of Black power, as symbolic reference points and as a source of strength for their political and social initiatives is to look to the past. It is akin, as he puts it in his analogy that references both classical Greece myth and a classic of Brazilian cinema⁷⁹, to Orpheus's glance back at Eurydice as they emerged from the underworld, thus condemning her permanently to Hades and to the oblivion of history. Not quite. The *quilombos* are important for two very important, contemporary reasons.

⁷⁹ *Orfeu Negro* (1959), directed by Marcel Camus.

First of all, although the ‘true’ history of the *quilombo* remnant communities is important for the Black movements, their funders and stakeholders, it is a history that they themselves have constructed and that fits the political agenda of a globalised notion of Blackness—what matters most here is the creation of a symbol of Black resistance in the heart of the Bahian backlands. For the organisations in Salvador, it rounds out and completes Bahia’s place as the epicentre and nexus of all things African in Brazil. Scholars who have focused on the construction of nations and national identities have suggested that the restoration and rescuing of traditions, whether real or invented, is a common practice (Hobsbawm and Ranger 1983). For the Black movements in Salvador, any community that can potentially contribute to the founding myth of an emergent Black or *negro* idea of African Brazilian citizenship is seized upon with great fervour. That incorporation in the ‘Africanising’ program requires the forgetting of a multi-faceted and potentially diverse past in which African slaves from different backgrounds may have come together with white settlers and Amerindian populations to form a unique community appears irrelevant considering the gains—symbolic and real—that both sides achieve through the process of ‘purifying’ the past. Most *quilombos* represent a connection to a slave past quite dissimilar from the potently Yoruba oriented spaces of the ‘pure’ *terreiro*; they bear little or no resemblance to what they assert was the bastion of Africanity in Brazil—Palmares—and, most importantly, they contain populations that need to be *convinced* of their Blackness.

Informants in Bom Jesus da Lapa and in some of the surrounding rural communities that I visited frequently told me a story not dissimilar from the one I heard from Edson, Antônio and Carlos. “What makes them so different from us?” was a common refrain, along with “they are no darker-skinned than we are, so why can’t we get special status?” It is notable, however, that few informants seemed to begrudge the residents of Rio das Rãs the success they have enjoyed. For success, in the modest context of the *sertão*, is precisely what the community has enjoyed since receiving article 68 recognition. The community is now in the range of a functioning mobile phone tower, they have received monies from the federal government to improve schools and literacy levels and according to the Brazilian ministry of health website a recent World Bank donation has now allowed for upgrades to the settlement’s water system (FUNASA 2008). Instead of resentment, there exists the glimmer of hope in many of these outlying hamlets that they too might be able to get some kind of special dispensation or title to land, because they too are descended from slaves.

Choosing to adopt the kind of Black identity that leaders and activist scholars from Salvador would have members of predominantly Black, rural peasant communities assume is not about rediscovering the Africanity or Black history of resistance. As Edson tells me, choosing to be *negro* in the *sertão* is not about becoming African, it is about gaining guaranteed access to what matters most to a *sertanejo*—land. Therefore, the choice to embrace article 68 is not, ultimately, an acceptance of a new form of Blackness, but rather the means to

express an older identity, rooted in connectedness to land and the common aspirations of all people of the interior.

To conclude, I would suggest that the attitude that many of the Black leaders in Salvador, of activists like Abdias do Nascimento and of the scholars funded by Palmares have towards the people of the *sertão* is one that appears to be vaguely reminiscent of the paternalistic writings of Da Cunha. They profoundly believe that the people and communities of the interior like Rio das Rãs are, to use Da Cunha's words, the 'bedrock' of the Black movement and of Black resistance. Yet they are also communities that need to be reminded and tutored on what it means to truly be Black and 'African' in Brazil, much as Da Cunha saw a need to 'civilise' the people of the *sertão*.

Chapter 10: Conclusions

Theoretical Models

This dissertation and the research upon which it was based has sought to show how Black Brazilians in the northeastern state of Bahia use the idea of Africa to redefine and reinvent meanings of Blackness. It has explored how Black communities in Bahia have attempted to engage Africa, both as an ideal and as a real place, in a live dialogue about what African cultures mean to Black society in Bahia and, more generally, in Brazil.

From the early days of the plantation, through decades of slave revolt and 'return' to the West African coast, to abolition and the foundation of the Brazilian Republic, Africa has always been woven into the fabric of Brazilian society. Whether through its diverse musical forms, the culinary traditions of Bahia and much of the Northeast or through the varied possession religions found throughout the country, not to mention the enormous genetic legacy, Africa has *always* been a part of the Brazilian soul. However, it is only really in the last thirty to forty years that Afro-Brazilians, particularly in the northeastern state of Bahia, have started to consciously refer to Africa as a cultural and symbolic resource for manifestations of personal and collective identity. Africa, here, is seen not as a vague notion or distant remembrance that seems connected, in some small way, with cultural practice, sights, sounds or smells, but, rather, as a real place with real people with whom everyday Brazilians can interact and learn from.

Black communities in Bahia that seek to incorporate elements of African culture, specifically Yoruba culture, into expressions of Blackness—that is, into more than just aspects of religious practice but into a fully developed ethnic identity for those Afro-Brazilians who choose to embrace it—use, as we have seen, a variety of approaches in order to further their goal of Africanising definitions of what it means to be Black in Bahia. At an abstract analytical level, this interaction between Bahia and Africa—which in this work I term dialogic in nature—takes place in the metaphorical space of the Black Atlantic world. However, the exchange, the cultural *dialogue*, actually occurs in an incredibly varied assortment of locales including: the different religious centres—both Afro-Brazilian and Christian—of Salvador; in ‘roots-reggae’ bars frequented by African cultural brokers from cities like Cape Coast in Ghana; in classrooms at state universities where the Yoruba language is taught; in shops that sell African handicrafts in the old city of Salvador; and also in tourist nexuses like the slave fort of Elmina, the *route des esclaves* in Ouidah or at similar sites in other major cities of the West African coast.

In this dissertation we met Georgia, a young man from the Ghanaian city of Cape Coast who now lives and works in Salvador. Georgia has become a consummate storyteller and possesses an incredibly canny sense for knowing exactly what his audience wants to hear. Georgia arrived in Salvador through an incredible contrivance of circumstances that took him from his home town in Ghana’s Central Region to the heart of Yorubaland in the city of Lagos, Nigeria,

thereafter, to a variety of ports of call in the merchant marine and finally to the so-called 'Black Rome' of Brazil. In Salvador, as we saw, Georgia is engaged in a variety of occupations, but most of his regular income comes from leading groups of Black American tourists to important 'African' sites in Salvador and from making contacts with Africa-centric community groups who then hire him to play 'African' music and participate at public events. Life is not easy for Georgia, he makes a very meagre amount as a tour guide and even less as a musician but he has big dreams—opening a bar in Salvador's old city that caters primarily to the 'roots' tourists that now regularly visit Salvador.

Georgia is not the only West African in Salvador but he is, however, the only Ghanaian involved in articulating an idea of Africa for a hungry audience of Afro-Brazilians and Black Americans. The vast majority of West Africans who reside in Salvador are Nigerians. This is unsurprising considering that the primary ethnic and cultural focus of Afro-Brazilian community groups who are engaged in Africanising their identity discourse look primarily to the Yoruba society of southwestern Nigeria for inspiration and legitimacy. Of all of the Nigerians living and working in Salvador, the most important and influential is the professor of the Yoruba language, Francis, who works at the Universidade Federal da Bahia (UFBa). Francis is the most recent in a long line of Nigerians who have been involved in with representing the Yoruba culture in Brazil and with strengthening the ongoing dialogue between Brazil and West Africa.

Other Nigerians are also present in Salvador. Some work at selling West

African handicrafts in the city's old quarter, Pelourinho; others study at UFBa as part of an exchange program with a Nigerian university; and others are like Georgia—making ends meet through a variety of means. All of them, however, have become part of an ongoing process of emphasising elements of Yoruba culture—specifically, knowledge about the *orixás*, the deities that populate the Yoruba cosmological universe, and knowledge of the Yoruba language—into Africanised expressions of Black identity. To be sure, not all of these individuals actively seek out work in the community organisations and religious centres of the Afro-Brazilian community or work as tour guides to 'roots' travellers. Many of the students have come to Salvador simply to take advantage of a wonderful opportunity for travel and enrichment. However, the very exchange program that facilitates their transfer is steeped in the history of Nigerian connections with the religious centres of Salvador and their Africanising project. Simply by virtue of the fact that many of these individuals have come from Nigeria and can likely speak the Yoruba language—even if they are not themselves Yoruba—they are immediately individuals of importance in the dominantly Africa-centric popular culture of Salvador. Many of these young individuals are able to moonlight as Yoruba instructors outside of the main UFBa curriculum, become involved with Black organisations like the *blocos-afros* [Black *carnaval* associations] and typically become associated with UFBa's Centro de Estudos Afro-Orientais (CEAO)—a major source of intellectual and academic support of the Africanising efforts of the *Candomblé terreiros* and *blocos-afros*.

As I have emphasised throughout this thesis, Black travellers from both Brazil and West Africa have been and continue to be responsible for transacting ideas of Africanised Blackness in the space of the Black Atlantic—a metaphorical space that contains far more than Gilroy (1993) ever imagined when he first proposed the idea. Their collaborators in this ongoing trans-Atlantic dialogue between areas of Blackness are the anthropologists and other social scientists involved in exploring the Afro-American anthropological *problématique*—that is to say, those scholars concerned with unravelling the extent to which representatives of different African cultures in slave populations affected the emergence of unique Black cultures in the Americas.

A number of debates, some of which continue to this day, have influenced the way in which different scholars have approached the Black culture of northeastern Brazil. Some have seen Afro-Brazilian society in Bahia as a culture that still retains a large number of Yoruba cultural elements that have ‘survived’ the depredations of slavery and have been passed down from generation to generation. Some even go so far as to suggest that the Yoruba presence in Bahia is so well established that this African ethnic group is, in fact, the first truly trans-Atlantic culture (Matory 2005). Other scholars believe that the manifestations of Africanity that exist in Bahia are a product of the blending and mixing of different African cultural patterns in the great sugar plantations surrounding Salvador in the 18th and 19th centuries. Still others assert that the emphasis on African religious practice and Yoruba traditions in Bahia are more a

product of academic inventions and assertions of religious purity motivated by scholarly interest in 'Africa in Brazil' (Fry 1982). These different points of view all have merit, as I believe I have displayed in this volume. Moreover, they are all *partially* correct.

Reputations in academia are rarely made by suggesting middle ways or compromises between empathically asserted and dogmatically believed theoretical explain-it-all models. In the scholarship surrounding the Black societies of the Americas, two models hold sway in the study of African presence in the slave plantations and their respective adherents are often embroiled in fierce academic debates with each other. The first of these is often—though not, as I assert in chapter 3, entirely accurately—associated with the work of Melville Herskovits (Herskovits 1930; 1935; 1937) and his insistence that elements of African culture 'survived' the Middle Passage and enslavement in the plantations and came to form an important part of the cultural praxis of Black communities throughout the Americas.

This perspective has come to be a crucial part of the agenda of scholars that seek to show that saltwater Africans transported to the shores of the United States, Cuba, Jamaica, Haiti, Colombia, Brazil and all of the other colonies of the New World that received slaves were able to, proudly, nobly, fearlessly, hold on to their own cultures. There is much to this perspective that is inspirational and commendable. Moreover, in contradicting this perspective one must be extremely careful not to condemn the hopeful spirit from which it receives its impetus. I use

words like fearless and hope here because it is simply impossible to extract Afro-American studies in general and, specifically, Afro-American anthropology from the politics of racism in the academy. Herskovits' scholarship and the work that it prompted was inspired by the groundswell of anti-racist thought that arose from the revolutionary ideas of Franz Boas and the fluorescence of Black art, speech and writing that was the Harlem Renaissance. Therefore, it is understandable that the work of those scholars, particularly Black scholars, who have inherited the mantle of Herskovits, would be driven by a similar goal of reclaiming the African past. The work of these historians, anthropologists, sociologists and other social scientists need to be understood and respected within context of societies and academies—in Brazil, the United States and elsewhere—in which racist and colonial attitudes were pervasive for a very long time. Their ideas and contributions to knowledge on Afro-America attempted to serve as corrective to decades of oppression. This, in and of itself, is laudable.

The theoretical model that is often presented in stark opposition to the ideas of the neo-Herskovitsians is the approach put forward by Sydney Mintz and Richard Price (1976). This model asserts that the ethnic composition of slave plantations, like those in Bahia, consisted of individuals from throughout the regions of sub-Saharan African from which slaves were drawn, living in close proximity. In this cheek-by-jowl existence, only very fundamental notions of African culture were retained—what Mintz and Price called “grammatical principles” (1976:5). Specific traditions, especially those embedded in kinship

practices, were invariably lost or subsumed by the emergence of new Afro-American cultures. This perspective, dubbed 'rapid creolisation' by both adherents and opponents, suggests that the Black societies of the Americas were born in the social context of the plantation.

Those who support the model that African cultures resisted the deracinating effects of slavery assert that creolisation theories demean Black populations by suggesting that they 'lost' their culture (see Castro de Araujo 2006; Gomez 1998; Hall 2005; Thornton 1998). However, I would propose that the narrative of life in the slave plantation implied by the model of creolisation is no less inspiring or impressive than the 'survival' perspective. In this story, slaves from different ethnic backgrounds, different regions of Africa and typically speaking different languages came together, in spite of the slavery, to create new and richly imagined American cultures that combined elements of different African societies with those of the master's European traditions. In this, we see not only the birth of Afro-America but of the cultural universe of modern American (used here in its broadest sense) society.

The present work is, for the most part, aligned with the perspective that the model of rapid creolisation provides the best sociohistorical framework for understanding the developments and changes in manifestations of Blackness in Bahia. This is because the quest for meaning entailed in the Africanising identity discourse presented to me during my time in Bahia was rooted in a desire to find an African experience or tradition that could help redefine what it meant to be

Black in Brazil. This is not dissimilar from the process of creolisation in which diverse communities of slaves looked to some commonality of experience in their African background to help forge a new identity—essentially, to give meaning to their enslaved existence.

However, I also align myself with the perspective of rapid creolisation because I believe, as I have shown in this dissertation, that the historical evidence used to suggest that we can precisely label particular Black communities in the colonial and slave era as definitively members of a particular African ethnic group is not sufficient to the task. Many of the historical records from which scholars have made suppositions about ethnic identity are, at best, vague, and at worst, utterly unreliable. Not only do they depend upon arbitrary and imprecise record keeping, but, furthermore, these records were written by individuals that were simply not cognisant of the shifting realities of West African ethnic and linguistic boundaries.

Herein lies the dilemma. As noble and as admirable are the goals of scholars seeking to reclaim not only the African past, but also the precise African ethnic pasts of former slaves in the Americas, their interpretations are not typically supported by the available evidence. However, this is not to say that cultural practices and beliefs that were part of unique communities within the overall slave population of a given area did not persist. In 19th century Bahia, it appears quite certain that there were slaves who traced their origins to Hausa people of West Africa's Sahelian belt, as there are clearly historical records to

suggest the presence of Islam in this region of northeastern Brazil (Reis 2003). Other studies offers convincing evidence that slave communities from Angola were also crucial in the formation of Bahian society (Ferreira 2007). No, the problem arises when scholarship, without the prerequisite historical or archaeological data, assert that contemporary cultural forms, beliefs or practices are definitively derived from particular African ethnic groups. This kind of 'butterfly collecting' is akin to taking a piece of music—let us say a rendition of a classic piece of jazz—and picking apart specific patterns of African call and response, forms of European instrumentation, 3/4 time and arrangement, and syncopated drumming styles that *had to* come from the Guinea Coast. In this kind of dissection the richness and flavour of the original piece is completely lost.

Where did the Hausa presence in Bahia come from? How many proto-Yoruba were there in the Bahian *recôncavo*? Were there Akan? Mande? Wolof? Ewe? The ultimate goal of this work has been to suggest that it doesn't really matter, that, ultimately, the precise ethnic composition of the slave plantation is not really crucial to an understanding of how Africa is used in the identity discourse of Afro-Brazilian and other Afro-American societies.

Yet we must also grapple with the issue that certain West African ethnic groups have become ascendant in manifestations of Africanised Blackness in the Americas. The two ethnic groups that have come to prominence are the Yoruba of Nigeria and the Asante of Ghana. The Asante monopolise images and ideas of the African in the United States. This is largely a result of the historical

connections and ongoing dialogue between the writers of the Harlem Renaissance and the intelligentsia of the Ghanaian independence and Pan-African movement. This relationship grew and blossomed through the 20th century and Ghana, home to the Asante paramount chiefdom, became the principal reference for Black Americans seeking to orient a new Black identity towards Africa. For Brazilians and for other Caribbean societies, Nigeria, and specifically, the Yoruba culture came to be seen as the wellspring of all that is African.

The emphasis that Brazilian expressions and explorations of Africanity place on the culture of the Yoruba is almost monolithic. To be sure, there are other African foci such as Angola and the Jeje or Ewe/Fon peoples of Dahomey and Togo but these are completely overshadowed by the emphasis placed on the Yoruba. Indeed, even elaborations of Jeje or Angolan culture in Salvador often include transposed elements of Yoruba practice—such as belief in deities named *orixás*. Yorubacentricity overwhelms all other aspects of African-oriented discourse in Bahia. Consequently, despite asserting that historical investigation into the ethnic makeup of the slave population is, ultimately, fruitless, this dissertation has sought to undertake some historical sleuthing to suggest origins for the accentuation of Yoruba practice over all else.

Certainly, as Matory (2005), Nishida (2003) and Reis (2001) have all pointed out, large numbers of slaves in 18th and 19th century Bahia were shipped to Brazil from the West African ports of Ouidah, Porto Novo and Lagos. Further,

although African point of departure is a very poor metric for determining the percentages of different ethnic groups in any given slave population (Nishida 1998), we can be certain that at least some of the slaves shipped from these ports—especially during the height of the kingdom of Dahomey—were members of the inchoate Yoruba chiefdom. This means that there were individuals who worshipped the Yoruba pantheon of *orixás* in the slave community. However, this historical assumption—and it is an assumption, not a fact—is nowhere near sufficient to account for the ascendance of Yoruba cultural practices in Bahia.

Another perspective, offered by Matory (1999; 2005), convincingly argues that the emphasis on Yoruba practice is a direct consequence of an ongoing dialogue between Lagos and Salvador in which ideas of Yoruba purity were cultivated through interaction about the nature of the coalescing Yoruba identity in Lagos and the prevalence of Yoruba traditions in some of the houses of Afro-Brazilian religious practice in Salvador. This back-and-forth between the West African littoral and northeastern Brazil made Yoruba the principal cultural trope within which all ideas of Africa were embedded.

A final point of view, covered in chapter 7, places Brazilian academics, US-based anthropologists and other scholars at the centre of a project to construct Afro-Brazilian religion and other Africanised elements of Bahian culture as representative of what these researchers asserted was a politically and cosmologically sophisticated African culture—the Yoruba (Fry 1982). In this model, academics and intellectuals sought to impose ‘invented’ ideas of Yoruba

purity upon those houses of Afro-Brazilian religious practice with whom they were affiliated. This manufactured form of Yorubacentricity spread beyond the confines of a few select *terreiros* and came to be a dominant cultural force in expressions of Africanity in Bahia and throughout Brazil.

I suggested earlier that the variety of theories for explaining the pre-eminence of Yoruba culture in Bahia all have merit. Let me explain why. Even if one adheres to the model of rapid creolisation put forward by Mintz and Price, there remains room for the expression, in different circumstances and at different times, for singular African voices to sometimes rise above the multiplicity of African and European culture in creolised societies. Price (1996; 2002; 2008) demonstrates this ably in his studies of maroon societies in Suriname and elsewhere. Maroon societies, Price believes, are most ideally representative of the process of creolisation because these communities, often located in the bush or in the hinterlands, were able to forge new Black American cultures out of a variety of different African sources. However, it appears that in some manifestations of maroon culture—specifically, Saramaka maroon culture—motifs from different African regions are more prominent. For example, the Saramaka's spiritual universe includes divine entities known as *Wéinti* spirits (Price 2008). These are wholly Saramaka supernatural beings—not Akan nor Yoruba nor Mande. However, from an analytical perspective, the etymology of the *Wéinti* concept likely owes something to vague Akan origins. That is about as far as we can take it. No other suppositions or assumptions about the origin of

Wéinti spirits or the importance of the Akan can be made. They need to be viewed, understood and categorised entirely as Saramaka entities. Otherwise, we risk making the same mistake with culture that is often made, as I described earlier, with a piece of music.

Similarly, there were likely elements of Yoruba practice in the plantation and they helped direct the emergence of a unique Black society in Bahia.

Creolisation, in some ways, is about recombination. The mixture of African societies found in Cuba or Suriname, in Brazil or Haiti, in Jamaica or Belize were all unique and so in no two places did the same form of American society develop. 'Survivals' of African cultures exist, not as manifestations of discrete African cultures *in toto*, but as whispers or subtle reminders that, yes, once upon a time, ancestors of Afro-American societies came from Africa and, in the midst of their bondage and incredible sadness, they were able to make new, whole and vibrant societies.

The perspective that the emphasis on Yoruba in Bahia is a product of dialogue and interaction between Africa and Brazil carried out by Black agents of identity and brokers of culture has much to recommend it. Matory (2005) draws on a vast array of historical and ethnographic data to construct a model that places the rise of the Yoruba—in both Brazil and Nigeria—in Black hands. One need look no further than contemporary cultural brokers, such as Georgia, Francis and others presented earlier this work, to understand why this perspective is so persuasive. The transmission of ideas about Africa by African

entrepreneurs of identity has continued throughout the 20th century and into the 21st. These individuals are active participants in helping to define Blackness for residents of Salvador and are also contributing, through their participation in Black 'roots' tourism and through the furthering of a Yorubacentric discourse, in helping to globalise an idea of Africanised Blackness that is composed of key symbols such as '*orixá*', 'slavery', 'roots', 'spirit', 'possession' and others. These key symbols, I have argued, are employed at a global level in the creation of a notion of globalised Blackness that makes a generic or homogenised idea of Africa the centrepiece of Black identity.

Finally, Brazilian and foreign academics—especially anthropologists—were and continue to be important sources of legitimisation for Black communities in Salvador. I suggest that this is the case because of the frequency and ubiquity with which members of Salvador's Black movements continually refer to the work of anthropologists such as Ruth Landes, Pierre Verger and even J. Lorand Matory as individuals that have given the ethnographer's imprimatur of authenticity to Africanised Black culture in Bahia. The work of these and other scholars at UFBA's CEAO institute and at the federally funded Fundação Palmares continues to be used to advocate for the importance of recognising and privileging African derived practices in Bahia's Black community.

My goal in this work has been to try and find the middle ground between that practitioners of the perspectives presented here seem to eschew. Like M.G Smith (1957), I believe that the pointless academic bickering over theoretical

models that, ultimately, can work side-by-side in anthropological, sociological and historical examinations of Black American societies is of little benefit—neither to scholarship nor to the communities under research. In this work, I suggest that the creolisation model best coincides with an interpretation of how Black communities use the idea of Africa in the contemporary setting. As a consequence of this position, I have, as seen in chapter 3, explored some of the deficiencies of a model that rests on ideas of African ‘survivals.’ However, this does not necessarily mean that an analysis of ‘survivals’ cannot bear fruit. I suggest that those historians who seek to understand ethnic categories and the cultures with which they are associated in the slave plantation turn their attention away from the verification of the actual presence of members of those societies. Rather, what they should be concerned with is the way in which both slaves and masters used *ideas* and *discourse* about Yoruba, Hausa, Akan or any other ethnic group in the plantation. This approach, one that does not necessarily have to accept creolisation as a fact, places Black societies in an American context, rather than an African one that cannot, ultimately, be authenticated. The use of African identities—whether generalised and essentialised notions of Africa or specific African ethnic categories—as a symbolic anchor for notions of Blackness is ultimately about the creation of *meaning* for historically marginalised communities. I contend that historical investigations into how categories such as Nagô [Yoruba] or Jeje [Fon] or Malê [Hausa] were used, manipulated and constructed in the plantations of Bahia can, in the end, be of more contemporary

scientific and intellectual value than assertions that such ethnic groups were actually present in the slave communities of Brazil or, indeed, anywhere else in the Americas.

Resonance

In chapters 8 and 9, I explored how African-oriented identity discourses do not resonate with all segments of the Black community in Bahia. Indeed, there remains considerable ambivalence, resistance and occasional hostility towards the Africanising agenda of Black elites in the *terreiros* and *blocos-afros* of Salvador and of their academic interlocutors at UFBa, Palmares and elsewhere.

Amongst Catholics who worship in the context of the Pastoral Afro and who frequent predominantly Afro-Brazilian churches in Salvador, alternative expressions of Blackness, such as reverence for the tortured slave Anastácia and participation in the inculturated mass, take precedence over Yorubacentric religious forms or language instruction. Individuals such as Maria, a street-seller of one the most iconic manifestations of Bahia's Africanity, *acarajé*, the West African-derived food made of bean flour, chillies, okra and fried in palm oil, admits that she uses the African symbols of Bahia but does not really believe in them. Maria's life story, described in chapter 8, is one in which a Black form of Catholicism that speaks directly to her experience as a Black woman in Salvador continues to be an important foundation for her life and for her identity. She admits that Brazil is a racist country, but also that Africanity or the Yoruba culture

that underpins it in Bahia is of no immediate relevance to her daily life. Maria does not deny that being an *acarajé* vendor is hard work and that she makes a very meagre living from selling snacks on the street. But she seems resigned to her life—one of menial work and little hope for change in the future. Further, she does not believe that the militant African message of the Black movements can help bring about much change for her or for her fellows.

Members of the evangelical churches, especially the large neo-Pentecostal megachurches, are more than ambivalent about the Africanising project of the Black movements—they condemn the influence of African culture and the Afro-Brazilian possession religions as devil worship and as a source of spiritual corruption for Brazilian society. These churches continue to make significant inroads into the impoverished neighbourhoods of Brazil's towns and cities. They claim that they can offer real remedies and solutions to life's problems—that through prayer and devotion to Christ, through the intercession of flamboyant evangelical pastors, poor Black communities can be released from the cycle of poverty. Additionally, the mode of worship that is practiced in the neo-Pentecostal churches is one that appeals to many in the Black community, especially in Salvador, where emotive and exuberant forms of religious performance are the norm. Members of the evangelical churches, notably the large and incredible influential Igreja Universal do Reino de Deus, who identify themselves as Afro-Brazilian, believe that the Black movement in Bahia is being led down the wrong path. They see this primarily as a result of the undue influence wielded by the

terreiros, *blocos-afros* and other organisations involved with injecting ideas about Africa into constructions of Brazilian Blackness.

Finally, this dissertation explored how ideas of Africa and Africanised Black identity play in the hardscrabble interior of Bahia—the *sertão*. These backlands have long been an important part of the Brazilian imaginary, existing on a frontier that, like the one posited by Turner (1893) in the United States, has helped to define much of what it means to be Brazilian. Here in the arid and remote Brazilian hinterland, the Black movements of Salvador have sought to preserve another important symbol of Africa and of the slave past.

Throughout the colonial era, rebel and runaway slaves fled to the desolate and forbidding *sertão* and founded communities that, like those studied by Price, came to be truly creolised settlements. In these so-called *quilombos*, slaves from a variety of African backgrounds along with Amerindian groups, wandering interior missionaries and European prospectors came together to found villages and towns in the desert—away from the prosperous and fertile land of the Bahian coast. In recent years, the Brazilian government, under pressure from scholars, community advocates and anti-racism groups, have started to provide legal protection for *quilombo* remnant communities under a new provision in the Brazilian constitution. Many of these small rural communities typically face harassment and the threat of encroachment and eviction from their land by large cattle ranches in the interior. In response, the Black movements—aided by anthropologists and funded by groups such as Palmares—have become

embroiled in helping to determine whether or not a rural community was, in fact, a *quilombo*. This has resulted in a number of legal victories for small communities in the interior who have now been granted, through use of the *quilombo* clause, title to the land on which their community rests.

However, those villages and settlements that have been declared a *comunidade remanescente de quilombo* [maroon remnant community] have had to change much about their founding narratives. Often this means that the place of African religious traditions is accentuated and any contributions made to a community by non-Black elements—such as Amerindian groups—are downplayed. This is all done to conform to the ‘official’ criteria of what composed a *quilombo* during the colonial era—a definition created with the assistance of community groups and scholars committed to an Africa-centric ideal for the Black communities of Bahia. This definition casts Brazilian maroon communities as bastions of African cultural ‘survivals’, where African rituals and African beliefs were preserved, unsullied by European cultures. This is an irony, in that most *quilombo* remnant communities in the interior are often, as chapter 9 discussed, only vaguely aware of descent from runaway slaves and are, for the most part, small rural communities where *sertão* or peasant identities supersede or completely eclipse notions of Blackness or Africanity.

The origin and status of these communities has also become a contested issue for *sertanejos* [residents of the *sertão*] who live on the outskirts of larger towns in the interior. Many of these individuals claim to have Black ancestry and

plaintively remark that they too should be entitled to land and that the inhabitants of communities granted *quilombo* status are no Blacker, no more in-tune with their slave roots, than anybody else in the *sertão*.

The Politics of Blackness in Brazil

Brazilian sociologist Luiza Bairros has recently called Afro-Brazilian society “a community of destiny” (2008:50). This destiny, she writes, can only be achieved through a concerted and unified effort on the part of all members of the Black community to come together to continue to fight racism and, once and for all, “collapse the myth of racial democracy” (Bairros 2008:51). However, she sees one problem that still remains: the fragmentation of the Black community into segments or interest groups. She continues: “a major tendency within the Black population has been the propensity to organise in segments—as women, as lesbians, as rural residents of *quilombos*, as youth, by arenas of social life” (Bairros 2008:51). This kind of fractured response to racism, she asserts, prevents consensus and, consequently, the ability to mobilise action and ideology in terms of what Blackness means to all Afro-Brazilians.

But there’s the rub—many Afro-Brazilians do not *want* to conceive of Blackness in the same terms as those laid down by the Black movements, by the *terreiros*, by scholars or by *blocos-afros*. There is great diversity in the Black communities of Brazil and not all of them are interested in articulating an African-oriented identity or, for the matter, a Black identity. Many ‘segments’ of the Black

community are not interested in participating in the Africa-centric discourse of the Black movements. However, they are not blinded by the distortions of 'racial democracy' or by faith in a non-African religious form. They simply find that identities that speak to African formulations of Blackness do not resonate or speak to their lives and their realities. Moreover, identity is not always a Boolean or binary choice. All individuals, all communities, all societies employ and negotiate multiple identities—ethnic and otherwise—in daily interactions with other individuals and other collectives. For many Black communities in Bahia, Africanised notions of Blackness have relevance, but they are not always the most important identity in their cultural repertoire. Once again, I return to the case of Maria—she is a Black, Catholic woman, but she also, through her work as an *acarajé* seller, represents all that is African about Bahia. For, although she claims the image of the *Baiana* selling her African 'food of the *orixás*' is merely a role she plays, it is an identity that she participates in and helps to propagate—thus perpetuating the image of Salvador as quintessentially African.

What is Africa?

This study has attempted to show the different ways in which Africa has been and continues to be used and manipulated in order to underpin what is, in essence, a Brazilian ethnic identity. Over the past century, Africa has come to mean many things to the Afro-Brazilian community and to Brazilian society in general. In the language of Da Cunha (1902), Calógeras (1930) and Rodrigues (1932), the 'African' elements in Brazilian society were a problem that had to be

eradicated through continued racial mixing and miscegenation. Now, however, Africa has become a cultural trope that has acquired significant cultural and political capital in the context of a state—Bahia—where Afro-Brazilian practices and traditions are placed front and centre in the public consciousness.

My argument in this work has been twofold: that scholarship on Afro-Brazilian identities needs to be relocated away from attempts to authenticate the past and that, even though explorations of Black identity in Bahia privilege the dominant African-oriented articulations of the Black movements, Afro-Brazilian identities are, in fact, incredibly varied and contested. Selka (2007:151) notes, quite poignantly, that this diversity and complexity presents the same challenge to theory as it does to the kind of Black mobilisation suggested by Bairros. However, I believe that this kind of heteroglossia, this multiplicity of perspectives, defines the very nature of identity. Throughout the human lifespan we are all forced to make ongoing choices about who we are as individuals, as members of society, of cultural groups, of institutions and of nations. Perspectives on identity that seek to essentialise individuals, regardless of origin or destiny, only serves to contribute to racism and intolerance.

All of us possess the ability to reshape and redefine ourselves, depending on context and circumstance and this is certainly true of the Black communities of Bahia. There are many individuals in Salvador who believe that greater incorporation of African cultural elements is essential to redefinitions of Black identity. There are those who wish to embrace the idea of Africa in more subtle

and nuanced ways, in modes that speak more to Brazilian realities than to African ones. Still others seek to completely reject the idea that Africa should have anything to do with Afro-Brazilian culture or identity.

In chapter 2, I quoted the Harlem Renaissance poet Countee Cullen. In his classic poem, *Heritage*, Cullen asked “What is Africa to me?” (1925:36). If Cullen were a resident of Salvador, living in a community like Curuzu-Liberdade, one would be forced to reply, ‘many different things.’ Africa is of vital importance to the identities mobilised by members of *terreiros* like Casa Branca and to groups like Ilê Aiyê, but to individuals like Maria or Edson in Bom Jesus da Lapa, Africa means something quite different. Even individuals like Georgia and Francis, two *Africans*, must grapple with what the idea of Africa means to them as they engage in composing representations of their homeland that speak to varied expectations and beliefs.

To conclude, I wish to suggest that continued study of the way in which the *idea* of Africa is understood, used, constructed and deconstructed by Black populations in the Americas is a field of research rife with opportunity for anthropologists, historians, philosophers, sociologists and other social scientists. This is the path that I believe investigation of Afro-America must pursue in order to fully understand how Black communities in an ever more connected and networked world relate to and incorporate Africa into definitions of self and community.

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