

A BROKEN CALABASH:

SOCIAL ASPECTS OF WORSHIP AMONG  
BRAZILIAN AND WEST AFRICAN YORUBA

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by

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The Aláàfin stepped into the palace courtyard with face stern and resolute, carrying in his hands an earthenware dish and three arrows. He shot one to the north, one to the south, and one to the west, saying: "My curse be on ye for your disloyalty and disobedience, so let your children disobey you. If you send them on an errand, let them never return to bring you word again. To all the points I shot my arrows will ye be carried as slaves. My curse will carry you to the sea and beyond the seas; slaves will rule over you, and you their masters will become slaves."

With this he raised and dashed the earthenware dish on the ground, smashing it into pieces, saying, "A broken calabash can be mended, but not a broken dish; so let my words be -- irrevocable!" The Aláàfin then took the poison that ended his reign.

Dedicated to

*Bàbá* and *Ìyáloḍé*,  
both my respected *ẹgbón*,  
and my *àbúrò* --

You sustain me.

And to the Redemption  
of the African Diaspora,  
whose only hope  
is a redefinition  
of itself.

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## PRONUNCIATION GUIDE

The Yoruba and Portuguese words appearing in this text are generally not difficult to pronounce. In Yoruba words, [ṣ] is to be pronounced like the English [sh]. The Yoruba [e] is something like a long [a] in English, and [ẹ] is like a short English [e]. The Yoruba [a], [i], and [u] are pronounced as in Spanish. The [o] is also pronounced as in Spanish, somewhat like a long [o] in English, while [ọ] is pronounced as the English [aw]. In Yoruba, [n] or [m] at the end of a syllable are not enunciated but indicate a nasalization of the preceding vowel. Tonal marks, which look like accents, correspond to high [´] and low [˘] tones. The tilde [˜] indicates vowel nasalization.

In Portuguese the [r] indicates a single, tongue-rolled [r], as in Spanish, while the [rr] represents a glottal trill. The [h] in [nh] and [lh] consonant blends sounds like the consonantal [y] in English. The [ç] is pronounced like English [s], and the tilde [˜] indicates vowel nasalization.

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## CHAPTER ONE

Introduction

The present study is concerned with the sociological role of Yoruba religion in two social and political settings. As it will be shown, the worship of the òrìṣà, or divinities, in West Africa presents a comprehension of and a charter for a consistent pattern of social solidarities in the centralized states of the Yoruba and, to some extent, in the neighboring states of Dahomey and Benin. The 19th-century collapse of the Empire of Òyó in Yorubaland led to internecine wars among successor states and incursions by Dahomey to the west and by militant Moslems to the north and east. In the breakdown of political order, large numbers of Yoruba people were fed into the trans-Atlantic trade, destined to supply labor for the cities and great plantations of the Americas.

So, during the early 19th century, it was Yoruba who flowed disproportionately into Bahia, Brazil. Though they never formed the majority of the African population of Bahia, the particular nature of their incorporation into this involuntary migration, which

will be discussed, led to the dominance of their religious traditions in the development of the flourishing 20th-century sect known in Brazil as "Candomblé." Here, the worship of the òrìṣà is adapted intelligently to the Africans' role in a new social order and to the constituting of a profoundly innovative set of social institutions.

Therefore, this study is historical, seeking to identify religious aspects of a state order occurring in a crucial time and place, where religion never stood apart from phases of economic, social, and political life which Westerners label "secular." Our purpose is next to trace the appearance of religious aspects of that civilization which were transplanted into new circumstances and were faced with a clearly different set of historical conditions. Data on these matters derive from several bodies of literature separated by the nature of the scholarly edifice. The first is a distinctly historical literature, concerned with the political history of the West African kingdoms and empires and with the history of the trans-Atlantic slave trade. P. Verger (1968), S. Johnson (1921), P. Curtin (1969, 1978), and E.G. Parrinder (1956) have been particularly helpful in orienting our understanding.

The development of these writers' shared assumptions and understandings of the historical materials is clear. All take careful account of the volition of African political actors; yet, common people's conceptions of their role in the state order and in on-going political developments remain, perhaps necessarily, undiscussed.

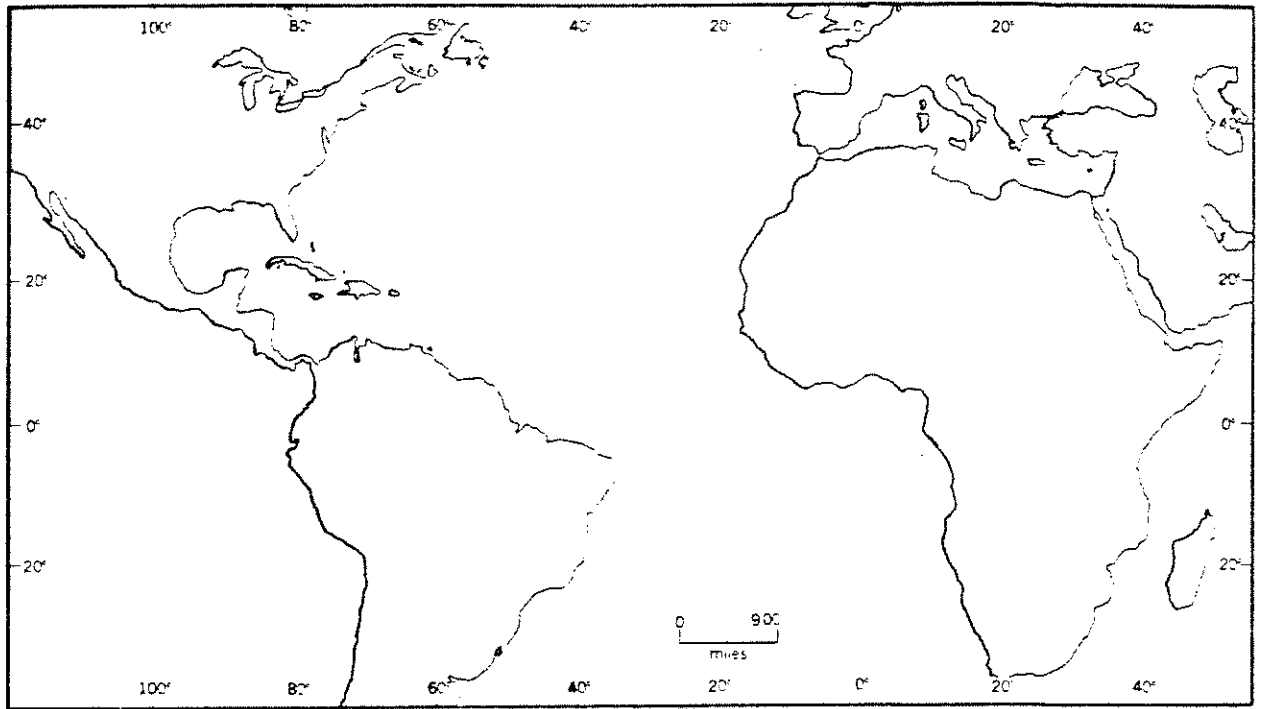
Within the same major discipline but part of a different national tradition, the history of Brazilian political and economic development, accompanied by the secondary theme of the social history of slavery, has naturally taken form around constructs that are not so concerned about the motives and conceptions of the African immigrants. This is to be expected, as in most histories of the Americas, where the person of African descent has been defined a priori as a "slave" rather than as a person with any choice in the making of his social environment. Nevertheless, A. Ramos (1939, 1940, 1954, 1956), D. Pierson (1942), J.H. Rodrigues (1965), F. Fernandes (1969), and K. Woortman (1975) have offered invaluable information on the lives of the African slaves and of subsequent generations of proletarians.

There is additionally that body of literature describing the culture of West African Yoruba and, on the other hand, that which studies the "folclore" of Afro-Brazilians. The first, usually written in the ethnographic present, often fails to address the dynamism of African institutions and the forces propelling change. Yet, many of these analyses are set firmly in the apparently apt heuristic assumption that West African religions, like others, are related in an orderly fashion to the "social structures" in which they appear. P. Morton-Williams (1964), W. Bascom (1944, 1969), P.C. Lloyd (1955, 1965), D. Forde (1951), and J.S. Eades (1980) are prominent.

The Brazilian literature tends to understand Afro-Brazilian religion as some mode of atavism or survival. Older sources, such as R. Nina Rodrigues (1945) and E. Carneiro (1936), treat these faiths as results of the Africans' failure to assimilate the dominant culture and even as an expression of psychopathology, in the case of the first author. Later writers of a more anthropological and sociological bent, like R. Bastide (1961, 1973, 1978), P. Verger (1955), and M.J. Herskovits (1966), have directed attention to how these religious institutions have

advanced the conscious aims and aspirations of the faithful.

It is my hope then to adopt a new methodological focus. The Afro-Bahian will not be viewed principally as a subordinate or underachieved character in the Euro-Brazilian society, disposable and irrelevant when he has outlived his utility to the owner classes. It is more complementary with the theological conceptions of these people to regard them as active characters in the social history of the South Atlantic complex of peoples. Their lives are profoundly and permanently connected to social, political, economic, and religious developments in West Africa, especially those in Yorubaland. Our definition of Afro-Bahian religious developments and accomplishments will be oriented geographically not by an image of Brazil or the Americas alone but by an image of the collective land masses of the South Atlantic -- West Africa, Brazil, and the Caribbean islands. If not for its inelegance, the term "Bahia-African" would be used in preference to "Afro-Bahian," for in matters of religion Africa must replace Euro-America as the salient analytic focus. This is not to say that we



will refurbish past errors and attempt to reduce Afro-Bahian society and culture to a worthy or an unworthy duplication of African forms. On the contrary, we will see Candomblé as an innovative social and religious phenomenon which consciously draws its central archetypes from Yoruba culture.

In designing a picture of Yoruba religion and its transformation in Bahia, I have tried to integrate the awarenesses of several disciplines and several streams of scholarly research in order to understand, ultimately, the sociological dimensions of a faith and its institutionalization in two contexts -- one within a sovereign West African nation, and another among African slaves and proletarians settled forcibly in Bahia. In the former setting it represents a dominant state religion, while in the latter it is historically the faith of a persecuted and subjectively marginal group.

This work is divided into four main chapters. The first, "The Yoruba Dispersion," deals with political developments in Yorubaland from the 17th to the 19th century, leading to the formation of a significant Yoruba colony in Bahia. The social and

material conditions of Bahian slavery and the beginnings of African religious reconstruction are delineated in the second half of that chapter. In the second chapter, "Yoruba Cosmology in Africa and America," I discuss those theological constructs which Eliade says narrate and justify "new situations." The cosmologies of two separated groups of people are assumed to illuminate some important features of the particular historical conditions in which they lived and continue to live. The consonance of these cosmological structures of understanding with academic sociological, anthropological, and historical understandings of society is enlightening. Moreover, the cosmologies reveal, under comparison, subjective aspects of the worshippers' and the theologians' thinking about their milieux.

Chapters Three and Four are devoted explicitly to evaluating the political, social, and economic conditions which are reflected in the peoples' cosmologies and in the nature of religious institutionalization and community organization. The titles "Kinship, State, and Cult Group in Yorubaland" and "Kinship, State, and Cult Group in Bahia" imply the homology of a pair of institutional networks. Yet, these chapters demonstrate some contextual and some

essential distinctions between them. I wish to reveal first the role of Yoruba religion in social integration and government in the Òyó Empire and, then, to discuss how Africans in Bahia made of their religion a constructive action against social atomization, alienation, and deprivation.

I do not intend to reduce people's ideas of the sacred to simple reactions to or functional mechanisms within their collective living. For this reason I have tried to describe theological beliefs and religious institutions in detail, taking account, furthermore, of the various indigenous and Western scholarly viewpoints that have interpreted them. It is as an anthropologist that I seek to highlight those aspects of Yoruba religion from which the central theme of this work flows -- the role of theology and cosmology in interpreting and creating social order. In fact, these aspects are legion on both continents, and they inform the very essence of Yoruba religious praxis.

Though I apply relevant concepts of religion and society from Eliade, Durkheim, and Malinowski, I should make my own assumptions explicit. When I

refer to the "constitutive" role of religious symbols, I do not assert that society is modelled after myths, as implied in the "imitatio deus" of Eliade. Nor do I subscribe to the view that Yoruba cosmology and theology are projections or epiphenomena of social structure. A more organic pattern emerges from the data, rendering such dualisms unnecessary. People carry on their daily lives, and, in comprehending themselves as part of a cosmological and theological order, they also give form to their lives. People's understanding of what they are doing is a central and effective part of how they do it. Yet comprehension is neither passive nor causative to social living. I believe that in the realm of the social, the ideal is one with the real. I isolate "Yoruba Cosmology in Africa and America" for heuristic purposes alone. That it precedes discussions of relations among "kinship, state, and cult groups" in West Africa and Bahia does not imply its causal primacy. The chapter on cosmology is intended as a springboard, and one which I believe comes close to emic conceptions, for the comparisons and contrasts that follow.

In conclusion, I will summarize how old and new forms of religious organization have reflected their social and political contexts. I will analyze these phenomena in light of the sociological church-sect distinction and reflect on the role of theological symbols among a people legally deprived of political and social volition.

In the chapters which follow, I will attempt to integrate dimensions of thought, action, and living within a dispersed "nation" -- in the course of which the full implications of this word will become apparent. As the reader draws together in his mind the pieces of this canvas, it is hoped that he or she will observe how intelligent and faithful people have seen their own situations and have acted effectively to make them better.

## CHAPTER TWO

THE YORUBA DISPERSION

The 19th century was a period of turmoil and disaster for the Yoruba Empire of Òyó. Having enjoyed for perhaps three centuries a dominant and unchallenged position among the Yoruba-speaking peoples, the Empire of Òyó Yoruba, under the Aláàfin (king) Abiodun in the late 18th century, had secured direct access to the Atlantic along a trade route of more than two hundred miles. The administration of new territory was conducted by officials of the palace of Òyó, and was controlled by the Aláàfin, whose powers were in consequence so greatly increased that the earlier constitutional balance of power in the Òyó kingdom itself was destroyed. (See Morton-Williams, 1967: 36; Johnson, 1966: 186-87.)

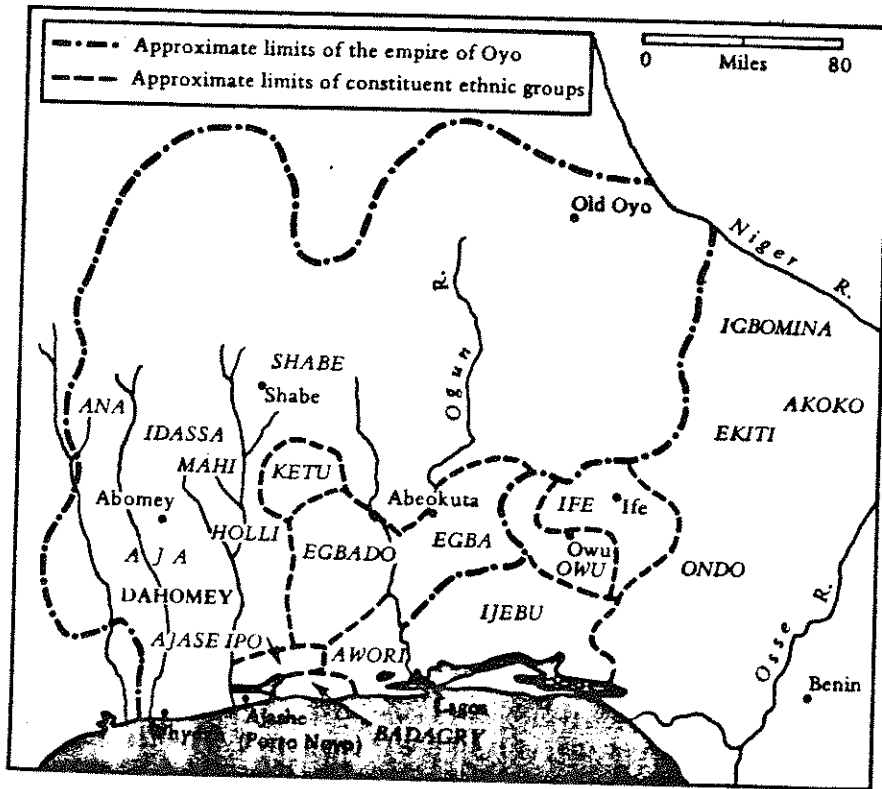
Unlike the West African kingdoms of Asante and Dahomey, Òyó failed to evolve new patterns of authority adequate to address the challenges posed by rebellion among the provinces, the European trade, and the threat of militant Islam. Though the Empire at one time subjugated thirteen of the ancient Yoruba kingdoms and parts of Dahomey, the decline ushered in

By the slave trade and internal intrigue was hastened by the rise of the Dahomean kingdom and Moslem Fulani incursions against which the Yoruba failed to unite. So, the Yoruba Empire collapsed precipitously, with the consequence that the 19th-century trans-Atlantic slave trade drew more heavily on Yoruba populations than on any other nationality.

A vast number of Yoruba men and women ended their Atlantic passage in the cities and on the engenhos, or plantations, of Brazil. People of Yoruba descent and those of Yoruba religious convictions came to constitute a highly influential part of the Brazilian population and perhaps a majority of the citizens of Bahia. So, the three principal themes to be grasped here are (1) the development and structure of Òyó as an empire, (2) the internal causes and external effects of the dispersion, and (3) the conditions of slavery in Bahia.

#### The Òyó Empire and the Rise of Dahomey

Òyó was one of the most northerly of the Yoruba states, its metropolitan provinces lying well out in the West African savanna where its economic connections



Yorubaland about 1800

quered the port of Ouidah, thus bringing Dahomey into contact with the European trade. Under the new authorities, the Portugese were permitted to retain their trade fort at Ouidah (Verger, 1964: 14).

Just when Agadja had succeeded in dominating the coast, Ọ̀yọ̀ began to threaten the independence of Dahomey itself. As the southernmost cavalry-using power, Ọ̀yọ̀' s advantage lay in moving still further south and southwest against states whose archers and musketeers could often be overwhelmed. Movement into the forest, however, would have been dangerous on account of the tsetse fly, but the "Benin gap," a corridor of savanna breaking through the forest belt in present-day Togo and Dahomey, opened the way to the use of cavalry against Dahomey. Ọ̀yọ̀ recognized the emergence of Dahomey as a threat and, in the first half of the 18th century, directed against Dahomey a series of devastating raids until, in 1747, Dahomey agreed to pay an onerous yearly tribute to the Aláàfin of Ọ̀yọ̀. The same series of aggressions resulted finally in the extension of the Aláàfin's hegemony as far west as the frontiers of Asante (Curtin, 1978: 242-43; Morton-Williams, 1967: 39).

In the 18th century Òyó reached the height of her strength, and in the second half of the century was one of the wealthiest and most powerful of the African empires.

To the king of Dahomey, the domination of Òyó posed a problem that might have been addressed in several ways. One option was to continue along the lines of centralized government and tighter administration, waiting until Òyó might weaken. But the choice actually taken was to build the state through an intense exploitation of the slave trade. This new direction began under Tegbesu (ruled 1740-1774), though its fullest development was to come only in the 19th century. The Dahomean armies began systematic annual slave raids, feeding a highly profitable government monopoly on the slave market at Ouidah. As a result, the Dahomean government came to depend on the revenues of the slave trade and, seemingly, to make an economic enterprise of the slave raid. This contrasted with the usual practice in Asante, for example, of selling only the slaves that came as a by-product of their military expansion -- still more so with the Benin policy of selling few or no slaves

at all (Curtin, 1978: 242). The Dahomean king attacked not only African settlements but also competing ports, capturing and enslaving African and European entrepreneurs and trade officials operating outside the Dahomean domain (Verger, 1964: 27; Morton-Williams, 1967: 39).

During this same period, the 18th century, the first slaves captured by Ọ̀yọ̀ began to find their way into the Atlantic trade, and Ọ̀yọ̀ began to face the problem of responding to the possibilities and dangers of involvement in the enterprise. Oral traditions still reflect some of the tensions between the military and the merchants' council -- one arguing for still more military expansion, the other wanting to pursue peace for the sake of trade. In fact, neither of these possibilities seems to have been pursued consistently. For the decades leading up to 1774, the Başorun, the chief civilian commander of the Ọ̀yọ̀ military, became more important than the Aláàfin, whose powers during this period were usually so circumscribed by councils as to make him a mere figurehead.

Then Aláàfin Abiodun won a brief civil war and built new power to his office. Abiodun had once been a merchant, and he apparently sought to develop his power on the basis of the slave trade, which increased enormously in the 1780's (Curtin et al., 1978: 243). The trade increased his revenues both directly, through the commerce of royal wives and eunuchs, and through the revenues derived from frequent toll gates on the trade routes (Morton-Williams, 1967: 41).

Simultaneously, the Aláàfin's military power was declining. By the late 1780's and the early 1790's, some frontier provinces became strong enough to break away (Curtin et al., 1978: 243). Acknowledging the importance of the kingship as well as the disposition of kings to misuse their immense powers, the policies of the Yoruba state limited the authority of the Aláàfin not only through the ceremonial and ritual restrictions on his activities but by subjecting him to the regulation of certain strong national corporations. Of these, the Òyò Mési was the most important. Second in power was the Ògbóni "cult of the Earth," a priestly corporation whose members mediated relations between the Aláàfin and the Òyò Mési.

A succession of strong kings would have menaced the capacity of these corporations to exercise their powers and to check those of the kingship. It seems therefore to have been the practice in Òyó, as in the other Yoruba kingdoms, to choose as the successor of a strong king a man whose disposition was judged to be more amenable to pressure from the various governmental councils. Morton-Williams believes that considerations of this sort must have influenced the Òyó Mésí in the selection of Abiodun's patrikinsman, Aole Arogangan, to succeed him. The consequences were grave. Aláàfin Aole quickly forfeited much of Òyó's military power in a series of blunders during his brief reign (1810/11-1816/17?).

His first and capital mistake breached the Empire's northern and western frontiers. The office of Kakamfò, military commander-in-chief of the Òyó armies, had fallen vacant at the beginning of his reign. Aole was coerced into giving the title to his ambitious and powerful kinsman Àfònjá, thus breaking the accepted rule that it should not go to a royal family member. Àfònjá, who coveted the throne, insisted on stationing himself not on a frontier, as was proper, but in Ilorin, 35 miles from Òyó itself.

Threatening the power of the Aláàfin, he increased his personal following into a large body, partly by coercing neighboring villages to move into the town and recruiting their men into his army, but principally, and fatally for both himself and the people of the Empire, by attracting Hausa and Fulani from the north. Among the Fulani who joined him was a priest named Alimi, to whom Shehu Usuman dan Fodio had given a missionary's tuta, or standard, and who had resolved to carry the jihād into Yorubaland (Curtin, 1978: 243; Morton-Williams, 1967: 42-3; Johnson, 1966: 188-90).

Moreover, Aláàfin Aole became locked in a struggle with the Òyò Mésì, creating a situation in which the ancient vassal kingdoms of the central provinces near Òyò allied themselves with the Aláàfin's opponents. Misjudging his position, the Aláàfin sent the Òyò army and Àfònjá on an expedition that everyone knew was bound to fail. He had hoped that Àfònjá, defeated, would follow convention and commit suicide. Instead, the army mutinied and the king's contingent was massacred (Morton-Williams, 1967: 43). In 1817, the Başorun, also the leading figure in the Òyò Mésì, sent to Aláàfin Aole an empty calabash, thus signifying

that the council no longer acknowledged his authority. Obligated then to commit suicide himself, Aole first uttered his famous curse. From the palace forecourt, he shot three arrows, one to the north and the others to the south and west, saying:

"My curse be upon ye for your disloyalty and disobedience, so let your children disobey you. If you send them on an errand, let them never return to bring you word again. To all the points I shot my arrows will ye be carried as slaves. My curse will carry you to the sea and beyond the seas, slaves will rule over you, and you their masters will become slaves."

With this, he dashed an earthenware dish on the ground, smashing it into pieces, saying, "A broken calabash can be mended, but not a broken dish; so let my words be -- irrevocable" (Johnson, 1966: 192).

The curse seemed to take effect immediately, for shortly afterwards, Ọ̀yọ̀ was abandoned by its inhabitants, and those who stayed in the area became subjects of the Fulani Emirate of Ilorin, whose sanctimonious warfare would later deliver thousands of Yoruba and other people into slavery. The majority of the Ọ̀yọ̀ Yoruba moved away, founding a new town of Ọ̀yọ̀ at the edge of the forest, nearly 100 miles to the south.

However, the Empire of the Ọ̀yọ́ had collapsed entirely by the 1820's (Curtin et al, 1978: 244). The states and provinces of the Empire became independent of central control and began to battle each other for the extension of frontiers and for control of the profitable trade routes and marketplaces. The principal beneficiaries of the Empire's collapse were the elites of the Yoruba kingdom of Ègbá, who founded a new capital city at Abéòkùta in 1830, controlling the routes to Ajase, Porto Novo and Badagry, and the elites of the Yoruba kingdom of Ìjẹ̀bú, who controlled the main route from Ibadan to Onim (Lagos) (Parrinder, 1956: 49]. One result of these destructive internecine struggles was that vast numbers of Yoruba captives were sold into the trans-Atlantic trade. By the 1840's, Onim (Lagos) and Badagry had become the greatest slave depots in all of West Africa (Oliver and Admore, 1967: 37-8).

#### Into the Trans-Atlantic Trade

Warfare and slave-raiding had enveloped the whole of the ancient Empire. Secondly, due to the voracity of the slave-trading monarchs, those criminals

who might traditionally have suffered lesser punishments were frequently sold into the trade. Johnson reports that from the time of Aole's reign, human confiscation and enslavement for the slightest offenses occurred daily (Johnson, 1966: 188). The fratricidal strife furthermore invited greater Fulani-Hausa and Dahomean predations. Every year, the soldiers of Dahomey still went out raiding. In 1886 they overran the capital of the Yoruba kingdom of Kétu, killing citizens, soldiers, and officials, but capturing most of the city's inhabitants and marching them back to the capital. The Dahomean generals ordered the destruction of the entire city, including the holy shrines, and apparently sold the greater part of the populace into slavery. We will later discover the significance to Brazil of the kidnapping of the Kétu priesthood.

For many decades, Dahomey repeatedly ravaged Yoruba towns to the north and east of its territory, supplying tens of thousands of human beings to the Portuguese and Brazilian negreiros embarking from Ouidah. Dahomean power was not subdued until the

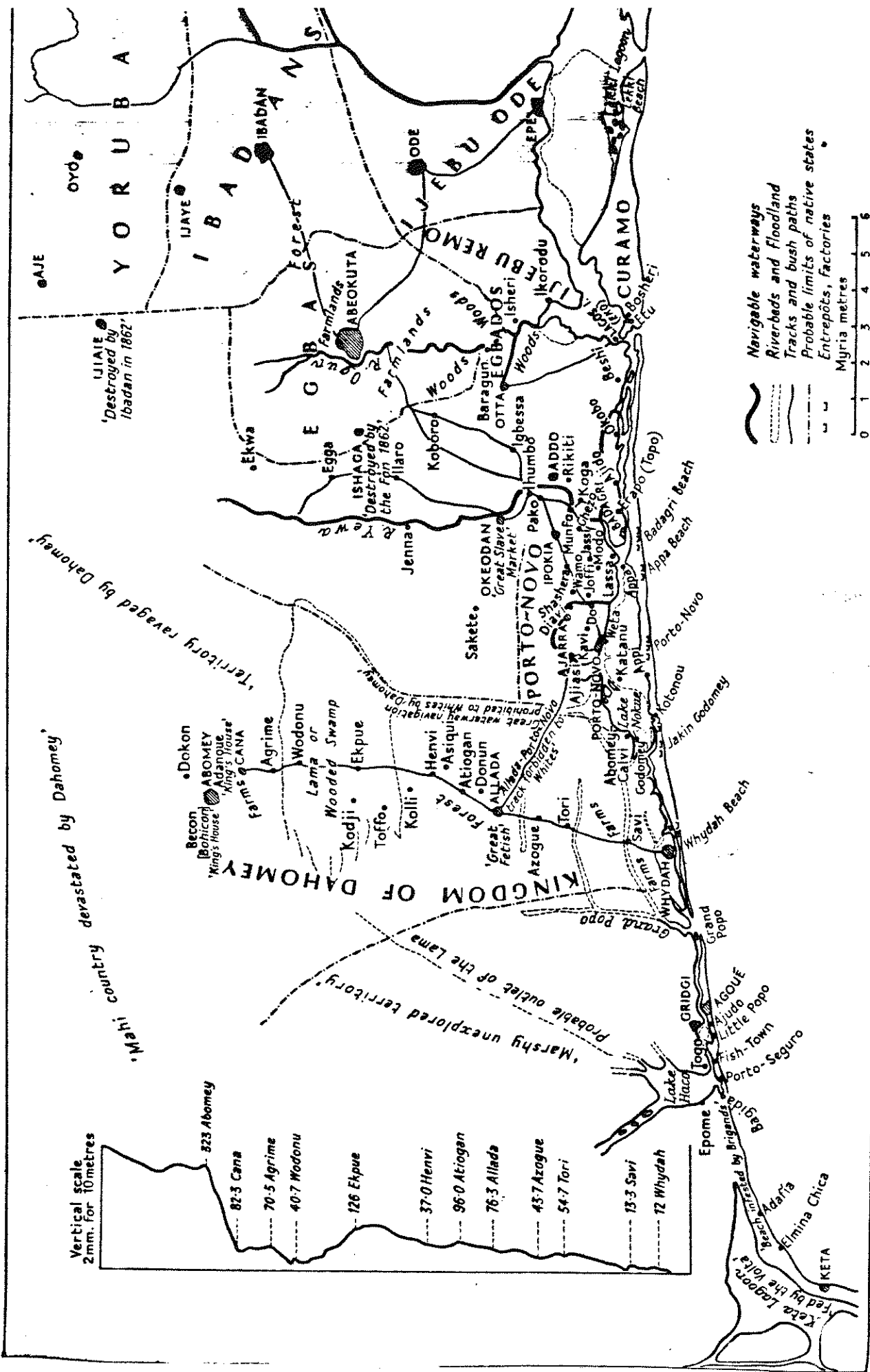


FIG. 4. The Slave Coast, 1865, after F. Borghero, Missionary.

1892 French invasion of the kingdom (Parrinder, 1956: 58-63]. This ended perhaps a century of Dahomean incursions and mass kidnappings, which, following the 18th- and early 19th-century decline of the Ọ̀yọ̀ Empire, occurred all the more boldly in western Yorubaland. The raids of the Dahomean armies which supplied the Portuguese and Brazilians at Ouidah augmented the already tremendous flow of human cargo supplying Portuguese, Brazilian, Dutch, Spanish, English, and Northamerican slavers at Onim (Lagos), Ajase (Porto Novo], and Badagry.

Authorities have estimated the export of human beings from the whole of West Africa at about 100,000 a year at the end of the 18th century. Figures rise to about 135,000 by the 1830's. Given our knowledge of historical developments in Yorubaland and of the preeminence of the Gulf of Guinea slave depots, there is no doubt that a disproportionate number of those kidnapped and sent to the Americas were Yoruba people.

Slavery, as distinct from the slave trade, continued to be legal in the southern region of the United States until 1863, and throughout this period

the illicit trade yielded great profits. There is evidence that the flow of humans out of the Gulf of Guinea ports continued to increase between the 1830's and the 1860's. The slave trade to Brazil and Cuba continued in great force even after 1863, though on a decreasing scale, until the 1880's. As European and Euro-Northamerican merchants dropped out of the trade for fear of punishment by their own national authorities, their role in the forced immigration of Yoruba folk was taken up by Afro-Bahian entrepreneurs, whose operations, according to Oliver and Atmore, were more difficult to detect and suppress (1967: 35). Verger reports that a large proportion of Yoruba were transported to Brazil during the period of illegal trading (1964: 31).

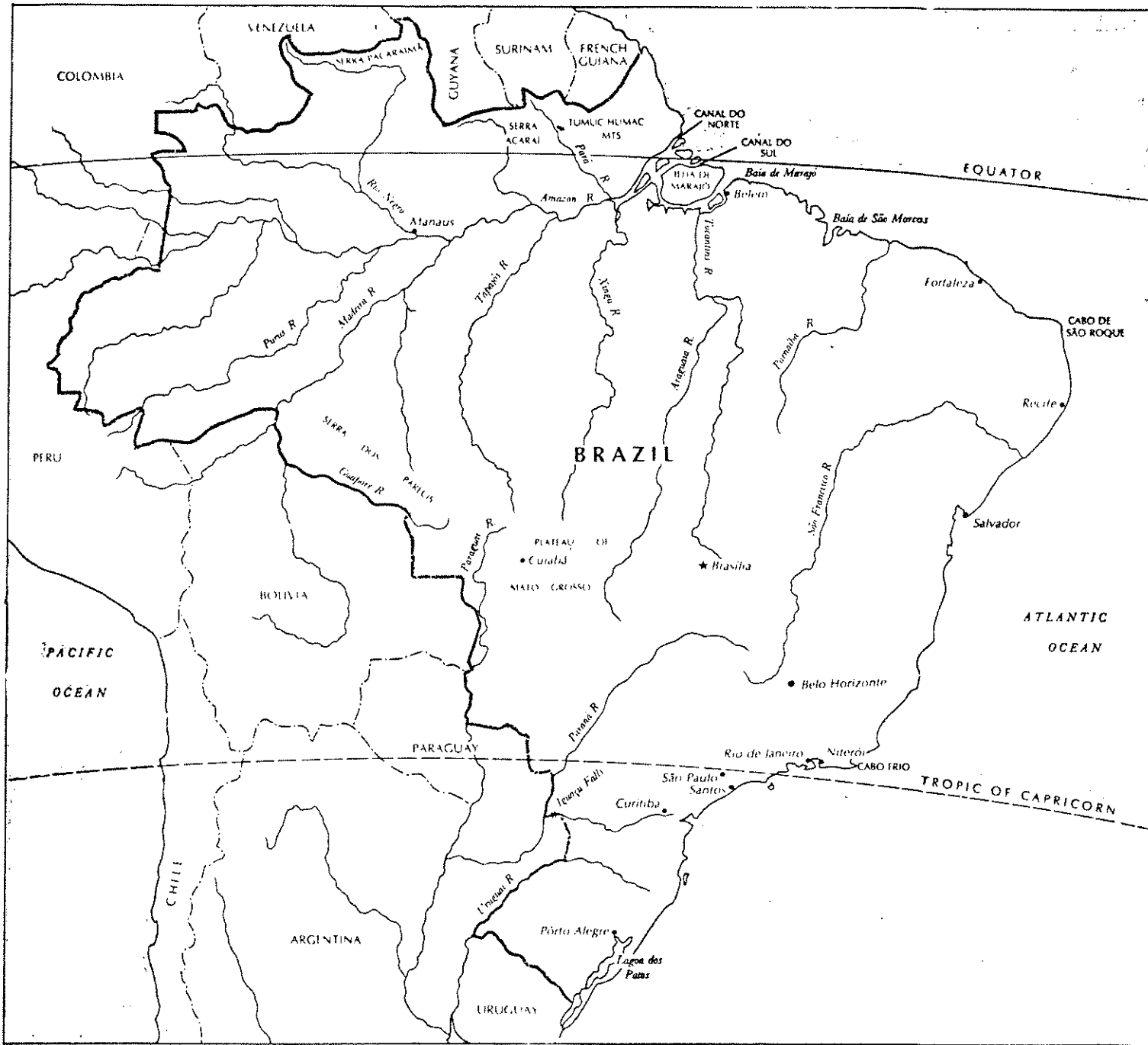
The foregoing analysis of political developments in Yorubaland and of the slave trade is relevant because we wish to understand a group of people, sent by force to America, who consider themselves Yoruba and many of whom manifest cultural forms highly faithful to those of West African Yoruba. It is a result of specific historical developments in West Africa, related to the collapse of the Ọ̀yọ́ Empire, that the

19th-century trans-Atlantic slave trade drew heavily on Yoruba populations, even though Yoruba slaves had been, in the words of Curtin et al., "practically unheard of in the Americas before 1750" (1978: 244; see also Verger, 1964: 25).

The Yoruba people suffered disproportionately during a few decades of political instability but were otherwise relatively untouched by the trade, compared to, say, Angolan peoples. The results of political instability in Yorubaland bear on the timing and intensity of the forced Yoruba immigration to Brazil, as well as on the professions and commitments of the immigrants.

#### Yoruba in Bahia

As we have seen, historical circumstances furnished the slave-traders with regular sources of supply in certain regions of Africa during particular periods. Likewise, it was the extraordinary development in the European and Euro-Northamerican demand for cane sugar, following on the heels of bourgeois revolutions in the 18th century, that spurred the growth of huge plantations in Cuba and



in Brazil, where they were called engenhos. The need for labor in the canefields and sugar mills of Northeastern Brazil thus increased greatly during the last quarter of the 18th century and most of the 19th century, especially as the Brazilian Empire opened its ports to free trade (Talbot, 1926: Vol. I, p. 49; Verger, 1964: 1; Verger, 1955: 3; Prince, 1972: 14-15).

Labor shortages within Western Europe did not permit an economical and large-scale importation of Europeans to staff the engenhos. In their failed attempt to subjugate native Americans, Portuguese colonists judged that these men and women were less physically able and less willing to perform the agricultural labor demanded of them than were African slaves. Moreover, owing to their greater familiarity with the territory, native Americans were more likely to escape their oppressors when compensation was insufficient (Verger, 1964: 1). The efforts of Jesuit missionaries to protect native people from enslavement may also have restricted the actions of Portuguese colonists. Thus, in the agricultural exploitation of Bahia, the use of African labor became more and more the option of choice.

Despite the coincident timing and mutual reinforcement of high Bahian demand for slaves and the Gulf of Guinea supply of slaves, Yoruba people were clearly not alone among Bahia's African colonists. Definite statistics on ethnic populations and on the slave trade to Bahia are difficult to obtain. Almost all the documents on the question were destroyed in Brazil in 1891, after the suppression of slavery, on the initiative of the then Minister of Finance Ruy Barbosa. In fact, most of the government documents on slavery and the slave trade were destroyed in this move, whose intent is interpreted variously. Some say that the new Brazilian Republic wanted in this way to erase forever the memory of slavery in the country. Others say the precipitating factor was the imminent threat of a petition from the former slave-owners demanding compensation for loss of capital such as English and French owners had been allowed following abolition in the colonies of those countries. The Minister of Finance suggested the destruction of documents on which claims could be based (Ibid.: 2). Ruy Barbosa's cleverness has been costly to later scholarly endeavors.

Official British documentation and the private records of British, Dutch, French, Portuguese, and Brazilian shipping companies have furnished the statistics we have. Various authors have thus observed the division of African immigration at Salvador into four phases or cycles:

1) The Guinea cycle during the second half of the 16th century.

2) The Angola cycle in the 17th century.

3) The Mina Coast cycle during the first three-quarters of the 18th century.

4) The Bight of Benin cycle between 1770 and 1851.

The Guinea cycle takes its name from the appellation given in the 16th century to the whole of West Africa north of the Equator. At that time the number of Africans enslaved in Bahia was small. In 1600, there were hardly more than 7,000 black people there, and these persons had come from a wide range of West African regions. Brazil was then to the Portuguese a colony of secondary importance, where settlers planted sugar cane and extracted a wood dye known as

"Pau Brasil." Far more important to the Portuguese were trade contacts with the Asante kingdom, from which they purchased gold in exchange for, among other trade items, slaves they had brought from the Zaire River Basin (Verger, 1964: 3-5).

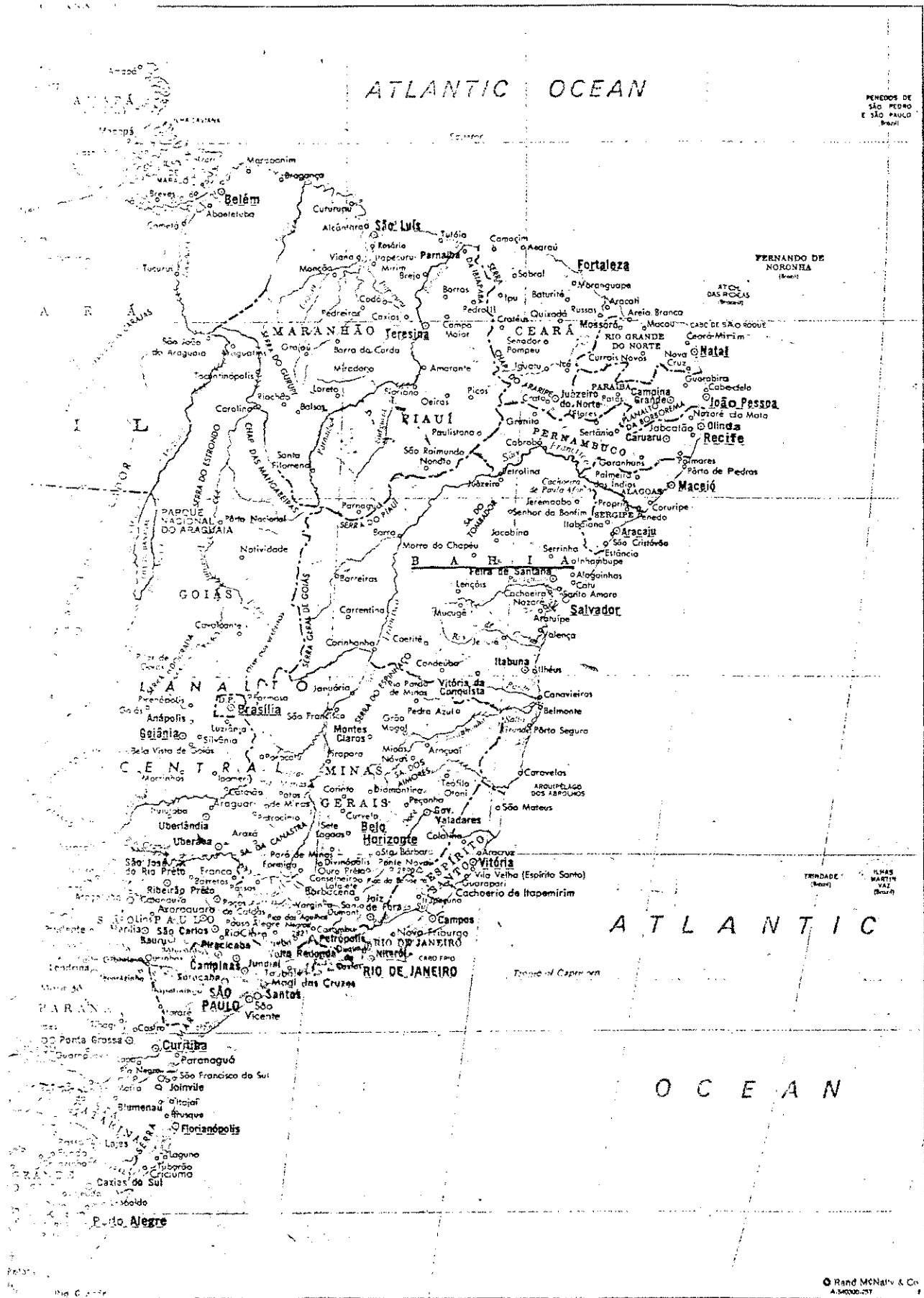
In the 17th century, violent territorial and trade competition between the Dutch and the Portuguese had severely restricted the latter's overseas commerce. Records from the Dutch West Indies Company show that the vast majority of the slaves entering Brazil at this time were from Bantu-speaking regions, principally Angola. While in the 16th century it was mostly African gold they wanted, the Portuguese in the 18th century wanted African slaves in exchange for gold illegally brought from mines discovered in Brazil. This period marks the development of direct trade relations between West Africa and Brazil (Ibid.: 5-6). In spite of their militarily enforced trade dominance, the Dutch had granted the Portuguese access to four eastern ports on the Gulf of Guinea: Grand Popo, Ouidah, Jaquin, and Apa. This region was known by the Portuguese as the Mina Coast because of its commercial dependence on the Castle of São Jorge

de Mina in Asante. In Brazil, black people called "Mina" were not from Asante but were shipped from these four ports. Yoruba, of course, became prominent among them.

In 1768, the British intervened against the Dutch and in favor of the Portuguese slavers, restoring Portuguese access to Ajase (Porto Novo), Badagry, and Onim (Lagos) (Verger, 1968: 212-19). With its continued access to the ports of the Mina Coast as well, Brazilian traders in the 19th century exploited the vastly increased flow of slaves out of the old òyò Empire and Dahomey in order to meet the demands of rising sugar production in Bahia (Verger, 1964: 5, 25; Pierson, 1967: 35). In 1781 fifty vessels were engaged in the Brazilian traffic, "eight or ten with Angola and the rest with the Sudanese coast [i.e., the Gulf of Guinea]." In 1800 twenty vessels were plying the trade from Bahia alone. According to customs house records, 29,172 persons from the Mina Coast and the islands of São Thomé and Príncipe near the Gulf of Guinea entered Bahia during the decade between 1785 and 1795, and in the last five of these years 17,409 Africans came from Angola. From 1797 to 1806, approxi-

mately 47,000 "Minas" (mostly Yoruba during the 18th and 19th centuries; see Prince, 1972: 67-68 and R.K. Kent, 1970: 338) and 11,000 "Angolas" entered Bahia (Pierson, 1967: 36-7). We see in the available statistics the growing numerical dominance of Sudanese over people from Bantu-speaking regions among those immigrants coming to Bahia during the fourth cycle of African immigration.

Using the inventories of the Arquivo Público da Bahia, Ott has assembled statistics on the ethnic origins of Afro-Bahian slaves covering roughly the years between 1702 and 1860. These statistics, for the most part, deal specifically with the urban population and do not adequately address the demography of rural areas. However, these figures usefully indicate the consistent predominance of Sudanese people in the city of Salvador and a consistent increase in the number of Yoruba (called "Nagô" in Brazil) and "Mina" people (Ott, 1953: 143-45). Early figures on rural populations confirm the significant absolute population dominance of Angolan people in the agricultural areas. From facts to be revealed on correlations between occupations and ethnic origin among the



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FERNANDES DE NORONHA (Brazil)

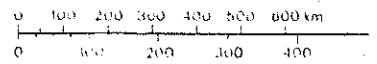
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Bahian slavocracy, it is understandable that Sudanese people, particularly "Nagô," would be well represented in the city (see Kent, 1970: 340). It is not reasonable to presume the absolute numerical dominance of Nagô people in ante-bellum Bahia, as do many ethnographers and sociologists seeking to explain the remarkable ascendancy of Yoruba religious beliefs and organization among the whole of Bahia's African population (e.g., Verger, 1955: 3-4). It is the peculiar density of the Yoruba immigration and the concentration of these people in the city that account in significant part for Yoruba religious dominance. Some additional factors will be discussed in the following section.

#### The Conditions of Bahian Slavery

Most of the Africans entering and remaining in the vicinity of Bahia were employed in planting, cultivation, harvesting, processing, and marketing of sugar cane and tobacco. A limited number were engaged in cattle-raising. They also supplied the necessary artisanal and domestic labor on the engenhos. Within the city of Salvador, as in other Brazilian ports, many slaves were engaged in domestic service. However, another modified form of slavery was quite prevalent. Many Africans, known as negros de ganho

(lit., "hook Negroes"), were employed as porters, stevedores, ironworkers, masons, carpenters, carriage- and cabinet-makers, printers, sign and ornament painters, silversmiths, lithographers, sculptors in wood and stone, small shopkeepers, and street merchants. They were semi-independent, living apart from their owners and arranging their own employment. They were usually required to pay a stated sum weekly to their owners, after which they might retain the balance for their own use. The majority of urban slaves in Bahia, the negros de ganho are reported to have been principally Nagô, Gêge, and Hausa (Pierson, 1967: 38-9; Prince, 1972: Chap. II).

Regardless of one's ethnic affiliation, the material conditions of Bahian slavery were horrid. Opinions are divided on whether urban or engenho slavery was worse. In the cities, negros de ganho generally lived in unpaved and unclean ghettos that seldom, if ever, received adequate municipal services. There was, however, no shortage of brutal police action against urban Africans. The financial situation of the negros de ganho made adequate food, clothing,

and housing quite difficult to obtain. In the 19<sup>th</sup> century, Salvador was rife with epidemics of dysentery, cholera, smallpox, measles, yellow fever, typhoid fever, syphilis, and tuberculosis (Carneiro, 1964: 55; J.H. Rodrigues, 1965, Vol. I: 186; Prince, 1972: 43-9).

Bahian slaves experienced notoriously high rates of extreme depression, known as banzo. It was thought to reflect a longing for their homelands, but the symptoms seem to reflect a much more profound distress. Afflicted persons starved themselves to death, amputated their own arms and legs, blinded themselves, and ate dirt and drank toxic liquids in attempts to commit suicide (Querino, 1935: 23).

The conditions of the engenho were probably no better. Charles Pennel, the British consul at Bahia in 1827, describes a situation that is in many ways typical of sugar plantation societies. He wrote, "The annual mortality on many plantations is so great, that unless their numbers were augmented from abroad the whole slave population would become extinct in the course of about 20 years; the proprietors act on the calculation that it is cheaper to buy male slaves than to rear Negro children." (Cited by Leslie Bethel, 1970: 41-2). The average working life of a slave in

Northeastern Brazil was at this time about 10 years (J.H. Rodrigues, 1965: 111; Prince, 1972: 54). Free black people and especially free Africans, if not the free mulatto, lived under material conditions that were only slightly better than those of the average slave. The extraordinary history of black revolt in Bahia, led in great part by Nagô people, signaled the dissatisfaction of Afro-Bahians in servitude and their willingness to struggle against their circumstances (see Clovis Moura, 1959; Nina Rodrigues, 1945).

Both the Africans' efforts toward change and the state's efforts to redirect African dissatisfactions with the social order that enslaved them naturally reflected the values and concepts which Africans brought with them. Political and cultural expression were affected, just as naturally, by the constraints of the slavocratic regime and, ironically, by the efforts of the Brazilian state to support African aesthetic and social endeavors that they thought would keep the servile population politically divided.

### The Reconstituting of a Culture

In Bahia, Africans and their descendants identified themselves by "nation" and region of origin, or "nação." Various nations called themselves "Hausa," "Congo," "Angola," "Bornu," "Macua," etc. Dahomean people called themselves "Gêge," Nupe people "Tapa," and Kanuri people "Bornu" (Bastide, 1978: 475). Yoruba, as we have seen, called themselves "Nagô," the term used in Dahomey to refer to them (see Parrinder, 1956: 54). One's nation often became salient in social affiliation, labor organization, and religious practices, for each group brought its own language, traditions, and divinities.

The transplanted nations hastened to reinvoke familiar religious institutions, resisting the ideological constraints of Luso-Catholicism as well as the political and economic repression of slavery. However, ripped away from their societal milieux, African religions in Brazil took altered forms. They were subject to the influence of other faiths -- American, European, and African -- and were required to address new needs. Several historical conditions gave the Yoruba cult of the òrìṣà a special role in the regeneration of African religious institutions.

One of the earliest and most thorough students of African civilization in Brazil, Raymundo Nina Rodrigues, attributes the cult's overwhelming prestige and dominance to "precedence in the acquisition of riches or liberty" on the part of the Nagô in Bahia. Once the temples had been established by emancipated and relatively prosperous Nagô, it was these temples, or terreiros, that became the obvious institutional alternative to Catholicism (Carneiro, 1948: 13-4).

We have already discussed the limitations of the view that the putative numerical dominance of the Nagô accounts for the dominance of significant features of their culture in Bahia. First, it is dubious that they constituted at any point the majority or even the largest ethnic category of Bahians. Second, this explanation would fail to account for the inordinate influence of the cult of the òrìṣà on the whole of Brazil, where no one, to my knowledge, has claimed the nationwide numerical dominance of Nagô people.

There can be no doubt that the peculiar density of the Yoruba immigration, in addition to the high concentration of these people as semi-independent negros de ganho in the city, accounts for part of the

institutional strength of the Yoruba sect in Bahia. Further, Bastide advances the view that the Nagô garnered an incomparable esteem in the eyes of the African majority for having upheld most faithfully the form in which their religion had been brought to Brazil by the Kétu priesthood, which, as I mentioned earlier, had been collectively kidnapped and sold by the Dahomeans at Ouidah (Bastide, 1978: 195-97). In his analysis of contemporary Candomblé, Abimbola affirms the consequent significance of Kétu divinities and practices in Bahia (Abimbola, 1976).

The student of African history might object that the manner of slave collection consequent on the 17th-century collapse of the Kongo Empire and the incursions of Portuguese and Afro-Portuguese merchant-warriors into the Bantu-speaking regions should equally have claimed for the Americas a great many religious specialists from the Angola-Congo civilizations (see Forbath, 1977). However, it is to be noted that ancestor worship dominates the religions of most Congolese and Angolan peoples. And it is understandable that a well-developed ancestor worship could rapidly become

unviable under the conditions of slavery. Among Congolese peoples, where animism was highly developed, divine spirits tended to be connected with particular, local geographical features, such as hills and crags. Therefore, Bantu-speaking immigrants were far more likely to adopt the worship of Indian spirits which were native to Brazil (see Bastide, 1978: 59). Sacerdotal specialization in the Bantu-speaking regions feeding into the trans-Atlantic slave trade was nowhere as strongly developed and institutionalized as among the highly urban peoples of the Yoruba and Dahomean kingdoms. While these factors may have favored the appearance of Sudanese institutional forms in the New World, they certainly did not rule out a strong Bantu influence in most of Brazil, and especially not where Gêge and Nagô people were few (as in Rio de Janeiro).

If Bastide's assertion that fidelity to ancestral traditions is among the decisive explanations, which I believe it is, for the ascendancy of the Nagô sect, then the continuing trade links between Lagos, in Yorubaland, and Salvador are important for us to con-

sider. Apparently through this maritime exchange, many Afro-Brazilians have gone to West Africa as merchants and sojourners. The literature records several cases of persons who remained there for religious study and have returned to Bahia. This intercommunication between Bahia and West Africa explains partly the purity of the myths and rites of the Nagô temples (Landes, 1947: 28-30; Pierson, 1942: 240-43; Verger, 1955: 3; Verger, 1968: 8; Bastide, 1978: 165].

By any interpretation of the Yoruba influence, it is clear that other ethnic groups have borrowed the organizational system of the Nagô sect, along with their òrìṣà, whom others identified with their own voduns and spirits. Other groups borrowed not only the essential features of Nagô rites but even the priestly hierarchy (A. Ramos, 1956: 99-103; Carneiro, 1948: 13, 17-18, 60; Bastide, 1978: 60, 162, 195-96]. So, all along the South Atlantic coast of Brazil, we find a culture that is profoundly influenced by Yoruba civilization, and, most important to the discussion to follow, we find in the Northeastern state of Bahia hundreds of temples dedicated to a religion known as Candomblé. So similar is this

religion to the faith of traditional Yoruba in modern Nigeria, Benin, and Togo that Bastide views any opposition between Bahia and Africa as little more significant than the regional variations occurring within West Africa. All in all, changes undergone by the cult of the òrìṣà seem to be no greater than what was required to adapt it to the new conditions of life (Bastide, 1978: 197-200).

One must wonder, in passing, why European Christians in Brazil, unlike those in Northamerica did not seek to suppress overtly African forms of worship. The answer, of course, is that they did often try. It was not only African ingenuity but also the competition of interests among the Euro-Brazilian state, the senhores de engenho, and the ecclesiastical authorities that allowed Candomblé and other traditions to flourish. Legislative suppression and police persecution of African temples were, until recently, quite common throughout Brazil, especially when these organizations were shown to be connected to political activism. But repression came out at other times as well (Prince, 1972: 228; Bastide, 1978: 136-7, 164; Landes, 1947; Ramos, 1939: 82).

Since many of the members of the African sects believe in the Catholic saints as in the Yoruba divinities, consider themselves good Catholics, attend mass, and belong to Catholic Irmandades, or "Brotherhoods," one might have expected the bishop of Bahia's threats to excommunicate members of the Afro-Brazilian sects for "apostacy" and his orders to the priests to deny them communion to bring many of the faithful into the Roman fold. But this did not happen (Bastide, 1978: 163). Though the Catholic Church continues to express its rivalry with the African sects, its efforts to purge Brazil of what Rome calls "spiritism" have failed continually. We will explore the Afro-Bahian response in Chapter Five.

For its part, the state's first duty has always been to guarantee the security of Bahia's privileged European minority. This accounts for an important aspect of 18th- and 19th-century government policy in relation to the African majority, a policy which Nina Rodrigues summed up as "dividir para reinar" -- "divide in order to rule." Discussing the black people's outwardly secular street parties known in the Northeast

as "batuques," the Conde dos Arcos, current governor Bahia, wrote at the beginning of the 19th century:

"Batuques, seen by the Government, are one thing, and seen by the private citizens of Bahia they are something else quite different. The latter perceive the batuques as an offense against their dominical rights, either because they want to employ their slaves in useful work even on Sundays, or because they want to station them before their doors on these days of rest as a way of showing off their wealth. The Government, however, sees the institution of the batuques as something that obliges the Blacks unconsciously and automatically to revive every week the ideas of mutual aversion that were natural to them since birth, which are nevertheless extinguished little by little in their common suffering; ideas that can be considered as the most powerful Guarantee of security for the great cities of Brazil. If the different nations of Africa were totally to forget the furious resentment which by nature has divided them, if the Agomés came to be Brothers with the Nagôs, the Gêges with the Hausas, the Tapas with the Sentys, and so on, a tremendous and inescapable danger would descend upon and destroy Brazil. And who can doubt that suffering has the power to create fraternity among the sufferers? Thus, for the Government to prohibit the only act of dissent among the Blacks would be to promote indirectly their unification. This could only have terrible consequences." (Nina Rodrigues, 1945: 253-54.)

According to Verger, the most obvious result of the institution of the batuques was to maintain the cult of African divinities. In these meetings, the people's songs and dances, mere amusements of nostalgic

Africans in the eyes of their owners, in reality invoked the divinities of Africa (Verger, 1955: 5-6; see also Bastide, 1978: 49, 61, 127). Prince writes: "Religion had a double-edged function. Bahian owners tolerated a wide variety of religious practices, including African deviations from Catholicism, as a regrettable but necessary social control measure in bondage." He continues by stating that "religious ceremonies seemed harmless diversions from the rigors of slavery; and the diversity of religious cults, Catholic, Islamic, and Afro-Brazilian, as well as a variety of Irmandades, tended to further divide the servile population, thus forestalling mass insurrection." (Prince, 1972: 72-3).

The realities of Afro-Bahian religion have often counter-demonstrated this "forestalling" effect, however, and seem rather to have provided an organizational base and a guise for political resistance (see Nina Rodrigues, 1945: 125-166; Bastide, 1978: passim). In later years (we are aware of this especially in the 20th century), the people have organized their temples in such a way that individuals may elicit protection and support from the politically and economically powerful. This is a matter for later discussion.

Foci of Religious Recovery

The terreiros, or temples, of Bahian Candomblé belong to various nations and therefore carry on different traditions: Angola, Congo, Gêge, Nagô, Kétu and Ijêxa. The nations are distinguished one from another by the manner of playing the drum (with the hand or with drumsticks), by music, by the language of their songs, by liturgical garments, sometimes by the names of the divinities, and finally by certain aspects of ritual. Yet, the influence of the Yoruba dominates the lot of African temples, imposing the names and qualities of Yoruba divinities, ceremonies, metaphysics, and institutional structures on all other nations.

In this sense, and in others which I shall explore more deeply, the Bahian "candomblés," as the temples are alternatively called, may be said to constitute a "sect" (to apply Troeltsch's distinction) thrown off from the mother church as a result not of dissent but of kidnapping. Harassed by whites in general and by the officials of the slaveholding regime, the African slaves concealed their temples in places inaccessible to profane eyes. In places separated from the domain

of whites, Yoruba traditions were carefully preserved. Following the emancipation, Candomblé developed in the open. As it gained adherents among black, white, and brown people, the Yoruba sect was itself altered by its new social and political context. The nature of its institutional innovations is the subject of this study.

## CHAPTER THREE

YORUBA COSMOLOGY IN AFRICA AND AMERICA

As shared representations, with the capacity to narrate and justify social situations and thus to direct and control personal motivation, the origin myths of the Yoruba people are essential to our understanding of Africans' adaptation to new historical conditions. With the nature of the West African dispersion described in the last chapter, it is evident that Yoruba in Bahia, as well as those remaining in West Africa, manipulated a complex set of resources and constraints as they ordered their collective lives. West African Yoruba myths of the 19th and 20th centuries are clearly part of the social order from which they come -- an order based on empire, kingship, segmentary lineage, and kinship relations which were bilateral in theory but strongly patrilineal in practice (Bascom, 1969: 42). From a much earlier time, Yoruba in Bahia had to address themselves to surviving, spiritually and materially, in a thoroughly despotic and European-controlled slavocracy, where

the patrilineage (ídílé), the patrilineal and patrilineal extended family, and national kingship of any sort had lost, perforce, their centrality.

I hope it will be apparent that I intend to cast no reductionist explanation for the highly elaborate religious conceptions of Yoruba people. Nor is it the central aim of this chapter to establish the primacy of religion over other elements of society. However, Durkheim's discussions of the religious life contain seminal but very important insights into what happened in Bahia. Eliade's observation that myth "narrates and justifies a 'new situation'" speaks directly to the issue. Under the conditions of slavery, a distinctive, if diminished, Bahian Yoruba cosmology has developed. It will become clear how new myth structures have arisen amidst new social conditions and have affirmed the solidarity of the faithful in Bahia.

#### Yoruba Cosmogony in West Africa

The Yoruba creation myth varies somewhat from region to region and depending on whom one asks to tell it. However, structural and thematic overlaps

bring about a nationwide homogeneity that outweighs all disagreements. The following description aims at demonstrating two phenomena. First, within Yorubaland, the variation in cosmological conceptions is such that we may take seriously Bastide's claim that Candomblé represents one "cultural alternative" among various forms of Yoruba religion (Bastide, 1978: 199). Second, I wish to show here that West African Yoruba religion is neither static nor monolithic and, most importantly, that notable aspects of its variation correspond well to differences among political interest groups. Within Yorubaland, they articulate interpretations and justifications for a variety of political viewpoints. Myth is a living reality, active not only in ritual but in ethics and social organization. This awareness will be central also to the discussion on Candomblé.

According to Crowther, writing in 1943, one version of the myth explains that the òrìṣà originally lived in the sky, below which there was only primeval water. Olódùmarè (or Ọlórùn), the Supreme God and Lord of the Sky, gave to Ọbàtálá (called also Òrìṣálá and Òrìṣà-nlá) a chain, a bit of earth in a snail shell,

insisted that he was owner of the Earth because he had made it. The two brothers began to fight, and the other divinities who followed them to Earth took sides.

When Olódùmarè heard of the fighting, he called Ọbàtálá and Odùduà to appear before him in heaven, and each told what had happened. Olódùmarè ordered the fighting stopped. To Odùduà, the Creator of the World, he gave the right to own the Earth and to rule over it, and Odùduà became the first Ọni, or King of Ifè. To Ọbàtálá he gave a special title and the power to mold human physical features in the womb before birth. Thus Ọbàtálá was called the Creator of Mankind. Olódùmarè sent them back to Earth with a contingent of other divinities to inhabit the new realm (Bascom, 1969: 9-11; Idowu, 1963: 21-3, 27).

In this and most versions of the creation, the original inhabitants of the world were created by Olódùmarè or Ọbàtálá. In some cases, the creation of Earth, of the divinities, and of humankind were carried out by a male divinity alone. This seems, like the Hebrew creation myth, an ideal prescription for patri-lyny and patriarchy. There is a persistent suggestion

in the various forms of the myth that the World's primordial inhabitants are the forebears of the political subdivisions of the Yoruba nation. In the same way, the myth furnishes the charter for the Yoruba people as a whole, expressing a sense of unity through a common origin, in that Yoruba usually claim ultimate descent from Odùduà; and the Yoruba oba, or kings, validate their right to rule by claiming lineal descent from him through one of his sons. Only in a minority of recorded myths is a mother, Olóòkun (Goddess of the Sea), named for the sons of Odùduà. The standard myth suggests on the most basic level a religious justification for a kinship-based and patriarchic principle of political hierarchy, in the division of realms of authority, and, as we shall see, in the superordinance of one central figure.

Myths of origin amending the cosmogony often express very specific concepts of political relations within Yorubaland and of foreign relations with other peoples. Versions of the myth told by some at Ifẹ̀ and especially at the court of the Aláàfin in Òyó explain the hegemony of Òyó over the other kingdoms. According to the Ifẹ̀ version, Odùduà's son

Oránmiyan created the land. Oránmiyan's brothers, preferring dry land to living on the water, were permitted residence on the condition that they pay an annual tribute for sharing their junior brother's land (Biobaku, 1955: 15; Johnson, 1966: 9).

This version agrees in substantial detail with the myth recounted at the palace of Òyó, where the protagonist remains Oránmiyan (called Orányàn at Òyó), who, it is pointed out, was the forefather and first king of the Òyó Yoruba. Upon creating the land, he became its rightful owner; and this, the myth ends, is how it came to be that the Aláàfin of Òyó collect tribute and are called oba onilé, "kings who own the land" (Morton-Williams, 1964: 243; Talbot, 1926: 20).

The royal house at Òyó is particularly positive in its assertion of the other kingdoms' primordial debt to Oránmiyan. This elaboration is mildly incongruent with the stories most widely current in Òyó and elsewhere, in which Odùduà is agreed to have founded the first kingship, at the Yoruba heartland of Ifè, and to have begotten, ultimately, all the Yoruba kings (Morton-Williams, 1964: 243). In one case, Odùduà is the rightful owner of the land which passes equally

to all his sons, founders of the various Yoruba kingdoms. In the other case, Oránmiyan, Odùduà's youngest son, is rightful owner of the land, but he permits his brothers residence on it, at a cost.

This is one example of the political disagreements expressed in the myths concerning the relative status of the kingdoms. Another focus of this conflict lies in myths about the founding of the kingdoms other than Ifẹ̀. Bascom relates the basic story told in Ifẹ̀ that when Odudua, as Creator of the World, grew old he became blind. He sent each of his sixteen sons in turn to the ocean for salt water, which had been prescribed as a remedy. Each returned unsuccessfully, bringing only fresh water, until Obokun, the youngest, finally succeeded. Odùduà washed his eyes in the brine and could see again. Then he learned that, except for Obokun and the Ọ̀nì, who later succeeded him, his sons had stolen his property and all his crowns except the one he himself wore. In gratitude to Obokun, who became the Ọwá, or King of Ilẹ̀ṣa, he gave a sword; Obokun took it and cut some of the beaded fringe from Odùduà's crown, and because of this he is not permitted to wear a crown that covers his

face, as the other Yoruba kings do. Obokun went to Ileṣa, where he became Ọwa, and the other sons founded kingdoms of their own (Bascom, 1969: 11).

This form of the myth names sixteen legitimate princes. Among the most commonly mentioned of these are the Ọni of Ifẹ, the Aláàfin of Ọyó, the Ọniṣabe of Ṣabe, the Alákétu of Kétu, the Oṣemowe of Ondo, the Ọwá of Ileṣa, the Oragun of Ila, and a number of Ekiti kings including the Alaye of Efon, the Alara of Ara, the Olujudo of Ido, and the Elekole of Ikole. Many versions include the Ọba of Ado, or the King of Benin ; the Onipopo, or "King of the Popo at Allada"; and the Onidada, or King of the Fọn at Abomey. There was also, according to at least one source, the Oninana, or King of the Ga at Accra. (Ibid.: 11).

The myth recounted to Johnson in 1921 relates that it was the seven children of Odùduà's eldest son who founded the legitimately senior kingships and thus fathered the subgroups of the Yoruba people. His first-born was a princess who married a priest and gave birth to the Olowu, ancestor and first king of the Owu Yoruba. The second child was a princess who

became the mother of the Alákétu. The third, a prince, became the Ọba of Ado (Benin). The fourth, the Orangun, became the King of Ila; the fifth, the Ọnişabe; the sixth, the Olupopo; the seventh and last-born, Oránmiyan, became the Aláàfin. These princes became the kings whose descendants legitimately wear crowns. Vassals, on the other hand, wear coronets called akoro, marking their subordinate rank (Johnson, 1961: 7-8].

As extensions of the cosmogony, these myths concerning the founding of the kingdoms and Yoruba subgroups validate the authority of the various oba (kings) and provide the explanation for distinctions in rank among them. However, just as the myths seem to have been manipulated to justify tribute to the Ọyọ kingdom during the Empire, they have since been used to justify the risen status of certain ambitious oba. Today there are over 50 oba who legitimate their authority by claiming descent from the sons and grandsons of Odùduà and to have migrated directly from Ifẹ̀. Some of these actually assumed crown-wearing status during the 18th- and 19th-century breakdown of the Ọyọ Empire and the consequent internecine warfare; others did so under Pax Britannica.

Formerly, if a town chief were to wear a beaded crown without the permission of the oba to whom he was subject, he would have committed an act of treason. That oba's armies would have been sent against him. It is not possible to determine how many kingdoms there actually were before the late 18th century, but according to Bascom, they probably numbered over twenty. It is evident then that chiefly houses have used the terms of earlier myths to interpret and justify new political status. Older kingdoms are less quick to recognize these status claims -- thus the persistence of smaller numbers and fewer names of Odùduà's recognized royal offspring in their myths of origin. The kinship idiom of mythical descent from the òrìṣà is clearly quite significant in the constitution of the Yoruba nation. Interpreted variously by different political groups, the myths retain fundamental structural and ideological similarities, like those that frame the debates and alliances of any culturally integrated group.

We have noted the distinctions among versions of the myth attributing the origin of supreme political authority variously to Odùduà, Ọbàtálá, and Oránmiyan.

These myth clusters represent in several cases the outgrowth of competing secular factions -- in Ifẹ̀, Òyọ̀, and Yorubaland at large -- and the sacerdotal factions under their patronage. Disagreements notwithstanding, the mythic pattern generally views one primordial divinity as the ultimate progenitor of the Yoruba people and views his children as the progenitors of the Yoruba kingdoms, of the clans, and of politically related peoples -- an acknowledgement of their ultimate connectedness (Beier, 1955: 20; Frobenius, 1912, cited in Verger, 1966: 23; Johnson, 1966: 3).

There is another striking level of correspondence between the myth structure and the political operations of the Empire. The parallel is so strong, indeed, that it cannot be ignored. In most myths, all the òrìṣà are royal children of Olódùmarè and are regarded as vassal kings subordinate to him as the other oba are to the Aláàfin. Moreover, the Aláàfin is a secluded king rarely seen by his subjects but ultimately responsible for everything that happens in his realm. In this sense he again parallels Olódùmarè, who became, at some early time, otiose and distant from humanity. The principal òrìṣà are each the head of a hierarchy of

lesser (usually more localized and specialized) òrìṣà, much as both high officers of state and vassal kings head hierarchies of lesser officials (Morton-Williams, 1964: 244-45). Like Olódùmarè, the Aláàfin is able to maintain peace and order among his vassals.

In the preceding pages we have unmistakable evidence that, whether stated as simply supernal models for the socio-political organization of the Yoruba people or laid down as the base for the national and regional genealogy, the Yoruba myths of origin reflect and justify various parties' highly similar conceptions of a sophisticated state order.

It is possible, in view of the functionalist and politically oriented nature of West African ethnography at the time when many of these tales were collected, that the literature exaggerates details of a political significance in the mythology of the Yoruba. This bias, of which the colonial officials and administrative researchers are often guilty, is less likely to have affected the information gathered by missionaries and theologians, like Parrinder, Idowu, Johnson, and Crowther, who have contributed much to these con-

clusions. Moreover, the high degree of elaboration and the impressive level of interregional consistency found in this political phase of the West African cycle of Yoruba myths seems, intuitively, to transcend the biases of particular authors.

However, the Yoruba cosmology does address myriad aspects of a universal order which we would not call specifically political. I have heretofore stressed, with no pretense of having exhausted the supply of Yoruba mythology, the worldly aspects of this order; but let me return to where I began, by refining our understanding of the larger cosmic order of which West African Yoruba traditionally consider themselves a part.

In all forms of the cosmogony and in most myths of origin, the three-fold structure of the cosmos is clear -- primeval sky and an ocean and a subsequently created habitable world. The West African Yoruba give names to each of the three levels. The firmament (visibly, sky -- mystically, heaven) is called ilé òrún, "house of the sky," or òkè òrún, "hill of the sky." The lowest level is called ilẹ̀, which means literally "Earth" rather than "water." The primeval waters are thought of as equivalent to the Earth in

some sense and also as having covered the Earth before being displaced by dry land. The middle zone, the habitable land, is called ilé àiyé, meaning "the house of the world."

The term àiyé, "world," has a wide meaning. It means the civilized, ordered world -- organized into states and governed by oba, the place where people live amidst their cultivated land. It includes the pattern or idea of life properly lived and the notion of a moral climate. Much more could be said about the affirmative meaning of "àiyé," but it is equally illuminating to see what it does not mean. It excludes distant uncultivated bush or forest and, on occasion, even long-standing wooded fallows (Morton-Williams, 1964: 244).

Morton-Williams therefore imagines the Yoruba cosmos as being made up of Sky and Earth enfolding an island-like World. Beyond the limits of World, Sky and Earth touch, for certain spirits are said to pass freely between them. The southwestern Yoruba and the people of Dahomey, who identify Ọbàtálá and Odùduà ("Mawa" and "Lisa" in Dahomey) with Sky and Earth respectively, represent the marriage of these òrìṣà as two whitened half-calabashes placed one on top of

the other, representing Obàtálá and Odùduà, the Sky and the Earth joining together to form the cosmos. This image originates in a tale recounted in restricted areas of southwest Yorubaland, where the gender of Odùduà is changed. Obàtálá and his wife Odùduà are coeval with Olódùmarè, who after creating mankind, left them the completion of both works. Nina Rodrigues reports finding this image in the Bahian interpretation of the cosmogonic event, except that the calabashes are substituted with the image of white porcelain dishes (1945: 348-49).

The transplanted Kétu priesthood was probably partly responsible for the transplantation of the myth, for the southwestern kingdom of Kétu may have stood within the provenience of this myth. However, the conventional versions of the cosmogony must have been widely known among Bahia's Yoruba immigrants, who had come from a much wider area of Yorubaland. The fact that the calabash image alone survived in Bahia is significant.

The Afro-Bahian stresses the point that in this sexual union of Obàtálá and Odùduà the World was created. Bastide believes that the myth is basic to the prevailing religious valorization of the conjugal family in Bahia (1961: 293-94). This interpretation

suggests an incorporation of the bourgeois Euro-Brazilian ideal and may be valid when applied to certain elements of the Afro-Bahian population. However, given the sociological realities of the region (see Herskovits, 1943 and Landes, 1947: 45), it is likely that the extraction of the explicit role of the male creator god and the survival of that mythic image which explicitly acknowledges the spiritual significance of maternity explain and justify matricentric principles of Afro-Bahian family organization. The new cosmogony reflects the female-centered qualities of not only the family but also those of the Afro-Bahian religious organization.

In Bahia, where the conditions of slavery destroyed male-centered social and political groups among Africans, the cosmogony interprets the social importance of carnal and spiritual maternity and of the groups thus constituted. This phenomenon will be discussed in Chapter Five.

### Syncretism

The most conspicuously new element of Yoruba mythical representations in Bahia is the identification of the òrìṣà with Luso-Catholic saints and the spirits

acknowledged in other African faiths, along with the more general phenomenon of the òrìṣà acquiring multiple identities.

As the prestige of the Yoruba sect grew, people of other "nations" came to assimilate its sacred beings to those prevailing in the Nagô terreiros. The Gêges, of Dahomeans, identified their vodun and the "Angola" and "Congo" identified their inkisse with the òrìṣà. The leading òrìṣà Oṣàlá (Obàtálá in West Africa) came to be identified with Olisassa of the Gêge, Lombarenga or Cassunbenga of the Angola nation, and Lomba of the Congo nation. Èṣù has been identified with Èlégba or Legba of the Gêge, Aluvais of the Angola, and Bombongira of the Congo. Ogun is identified with Gun, Roche Mucumbe, and Incossi Mucumbe, while Oṣosi (also Oṣoṣi or Oṣóòṣi) is associated with Ague, Mutalombo, and Mutacalombo. Each of the commonly worshipped òrìṣà has its explicit counterpart in the terreiros of each nation. Moreover, each òrìṣà is multiple within the Nagô nation. There are, for example, 12 Ṣàngó, 16 Òṣun, 17 Yansan (Oya), 21 Èṣù, etc. (Bastide, 1978: 195; Bastide, 1961: 200-206).

Each of the subdivinities shares with the major divinity an elaborate complex of symbolic objects,

colors, and personality traits recorded in myths and traditions (see Bastide, 1953). However, each of the subdivinities is associated with his or her own special myths. For example, Ôşun-Ioni is the center of a myth that is not found in the history of the other Ôşun: she was the queen of a great and rich territory. The land was invaded by the Ioni people, attracted by the renown of this fabulous wealth. They triumphed over the queen, conquered the capital, sacked the country, and absconded with the sovereign's fortune. Ôşun, in order to avoid capture, was obliged to hide in the darkness of the night. She got an idea and directed a fervid prayer to God. Then, under divine inspiration, she asked her subjects to prepare abará (a certain dish that came also to be known in Bahia) and to leave it at the borders. When the invaders arrived at the shore, they were famished, and, happening upon the abará, they ate. In the food there was not poison but divine power. All of the invaders fell dead. Thus Ôşun could take power again and recover her fortune and territory. From then on, committed to victory, she took the name Ôşun-Ioni (Bastide, 1961: 201-202; Bastide, 1978: 195, 204-205).

The diversity of names and legends permits us a glimpse of the assigned function of each subdivinity in Candomblé. Among the 21 Èṣù, there is one, Olode, that is charged with what happens on the road. Another, Ajẹlu, is the slave of Oṣàlá. One watches over doors, another reigns over intersections, and another is the protector of homes (Bastide 1961: 202-3).

Asked why there were so many forms of the same divinity in the religion, an Ìyálórìṣà (high-ranking Nagô priestess) once told Bastide that the Africans brought as slaves to Bahia belonged to many tribes, each with its Oṣàlá, its Ọmọ́lú, its Ọ̀gún, etc. In Brazil, these ethnic groups maintained their cults, recognizing that, under different names, they worshipped divinities that were basically the same (Ibid: 200-201). In fact, the qualities ascribed to the same òrìṣà do vary from region to region within Yorubaland, and these qualities do suggest in many cases that the òrìṣà are counterparts to the divinities of distant nations.

The terreiros often dedicate themselves to particular divinities and subdivinities and worship these with special care. For example, one of the most famous terreiros in Bahia, Ilé Ọ̀pó Àṣẹ Àfọ̀njá is dedicated to Àfọ̀njá, one of the subdivinities of Ṣàngó -- taking his name, Àfọ̀njá, from the Ọ̀yọ́ Kakamfò, or general, who

mutinied against the Aláàfin Aole, in the 19th century (see Chapter One). Another candomblé which divided off from it is consecrated to the youngest of the Şàngó -- Aganjú (Bastide, 1961: 204; Abimbola, 1976: 627). As in West Africa, each individual is the "child" of a particular òrìṣà or limited number of òrìṣà, and worships him or them especially. That different Bahian nations, terreiros, and groups of individuals "feed" and worship different divinities and subdivinities which are charged with different powers and responsibilities in the human world is homologous with the West African Yoruba's concept of worship, whereby the extended family, clan, or town that is principally responsible for propitiating the Goddess of Agriculture or the God of War, say, does so for the benefit of the entire community (Lloyd, in Gibbs 1978: 346). The division of religious labor seems now to provide a basis for the integrity of a multi-ethnic community.

One of the most frequently discussed aspects of the multiplication of the identities of the òrìṣà in Brazil and Cuba is their being first juxtaposed and then equated with Catholic saints. In Bahia, Oşàlá is equated with "Nosso Senhor do Bomfim," Ògún with Saint Anthony, Yemanjá (Yemoja) with the Virgin Mary and Our Lady of

the Rosary, Oṣoṣi with Saint George, and Omolú with Saint Bento. Èṣù is often said to represent the Euro-Christian devil (Herkovits, 1966: 327). This list is not exhaustive but represents a significant aspect of the mythic transformation. Several factors have encouraged this synthesis. One is the structural parallel between the Catholic theology of the saints' intercession with the Virgin Mary, the Virgin's intercession with Jesus, and the intercession of Jesus with God the Father and the Yoruba theology of the òrìṣà as mediators between people and Ọlórún. Another is the parallel between the function of the saints, who are each thought to preside over a human activity or to heal a certain disease, and the equally functional conception of the òrìṣà, each of whom rules an aspect of nature and who, like the saints, are patrons of trades and occupations, protecting the hunter, the metalworker, or the physician. Third, there is a sociological parallel between the nations and the Catholic fraternities (Bastide, 1978: 262).

As I mentioned in the first chapter, many members of the Nagô sect consider themselves good Catholics and not only solicit the aid of the Catholic Church on special occasions but attend mass regularly. African

participation in Catholic institutions like the Irmandades and the parish attest to their faith in the spiritual validity of Christianity. Through participation in a white-dominated institution, the Church, and through acceptance of its Euro-centric hierarchical conceptions, many Africans have assimilated a mode of theological understanding that complements (until quite recently perhaps) the standing relations of political and economic power in Bahia. However, it is evident that Afro-Bahians have participated in the organization and conceptions of Luso-Brazilian Catholicism to varying degrees. The incorporation of the saints and the devil into the identities of the òrìṣà represents one degree. And yet the conception remains Afro-centric: it sees power in the collective representations of the European-dominated society but retains, within the sphere of the candomblé and the community centering around it, a self-existent sphere of authority for that which is African and sacred and for the social relations thus sacredly prescribed.

The Nature of the Òrìṣà in Bahia

The most important and basic of the mythic transformations has affected the nature of the òrìṣà and their relation to the human world. Brazilian observers are agreed that the òrìṣà no longer represent to Bahian Nagô the ancestors of the nation or of the social group. Nor do they represent the formulators and creators of the global social order. Rather, they are "gods from Africa," who personify natural and social phenomena like the storm, war, wind, or vegetation (Carneiro, 1948: 79; Ramos, 1939: 275; Bastide, 1961: 176).

Moreover, the extraordinary significance given in West Africa to the origin myths in the validation of national and local political authority has obviously diminished. The high degree of elaboration in the West African mythology concerning the origin of the Yoruba kingships and the often fastidious concern about the genealogy of the òrìṣà have diminished drastically in Brazil. Whereas in Yorubaland the òrìṣà obey a mythical gradation corresponding to their role in <sup>that</sup> genealogy, which extends lines of authority and subordination deep into àiyé, or the ordered human World, the òrìṣà of Brazil

seem to derive their importance from a set of cultural choices less bound up with mythic conceptions.

Oṣàlá, Ṣàngó, Yemanjá, and Èṣù -- who is widely appealed to in efforts at vengeance -- have assumed an importance disproportionate to their roles in West Africa. Ògún remains quite important. The female òrìṣà have ascended far higher in importance and power than in Yorubaland. Òṣun, Yansan (Ọya), and Nanamburucu (Naná búùku), along with Yemanjá, have gained great popularity in Bahia (see Ramos, 1940: 43-53). Though female òrìṣà are worshipped widely in Yorubaland, the increase in their relative importance in Bahia may be interpreted as a clearer assertion of the validity of female principles in defining units of biological and spiritual kinship.

Understandably, it seems that those òrìṣà who were widely or nationally recognized in Yorubaland tended to retain popularity in Bahia, and others tended to be lost. However, the significance of an òrìṣà's prevalence, associated in Yorubaland with the biological kinship and socio-political solidarity of the òrìṣà-worshipping group, was altered. It is true that in Bahia, as in West Africa, the worshippers of a particular òrìṣà call themselves the "children" of that

divinity. The devotees of Şàngó, for example, are called omọ-Şàngó, or "children of Şàngó." However, the exact nature of descent in Bahia is different, or at least remains unclarified. The children of an òrìṣà retain a spiritual kinship that, as I shall discuss later, often bears an economic significance.

The system of human classification rendered in the name of the òrìṣà and under the terms of kinship assumed different sociological and spiritual qualities. The òrìṣà and the spirits ceased being state- and clan-ancestors who stood as dominant figures in an encompassing social-natural cosmos. No, the Afro-Bahian had been stolen away from the place where the Yoruba World was a central and organic part of the cosmos. Even as their children were enslaved in Bahia, the òrìṣà and their counterparts remained in Africa -- "Itú Aige," or "the Land of Life" (Bastide, 1961: 78).

Africa has remained the home of the divinities, who are persuaded to "come down" into the Bahian terreiros by the blood of the sacrifice and the beating of their special signatures on the atabaques, or drums (see Ibid.: 78). Visiting from the sacred place and a sacred time, they manifest themselves in the candomblés by possessing the priests and priestesses of the sect.

The orthodox terreiros bring down the òrìṣà and celebrate their holidays in quite a formal order, taking account of the divinities' relations to one another (Ibid: 253-54; Verger, 1957: 72). Candomblé ceremonies enact a return to the source and a recreation of Africa, curing the entropic work of time and isolation. The community of the terreiro is an image of divine society, in which proper social relations are restored each time the òrìṣà "come down."

### Conclusions

Developing on a minority opinion among West African Yoruba, the Bahian believers are not a group of persons descended biologically from the òrìṣà and therefore related to them as to greater elders and ancestors. Members of the sect are bound in service to the òrìṣà, but the faithful conceive themselves to be bound together not by biological ties but by spiritual relations duplicating social relations prevailing in the primordial "Land of Life."

The Bahian sect is a self-conscious isolate. No longer an organic part of a global socio-political and natural order, it seeks internal integrity by recalling the mythical African source. The Bahian myths of origin no longer insist on a genealogical model for the sacred

order which, in Yorubaland, commences so patriarchally with the act of a male Creator God. The terreiro and the whole community of the faithful, alike, ideally reflect primordial relations among the òrìṣà. The Bahian cycle of origin myths thus diminishes the centrality of the kinship idiom in social organization, responding to conditions in a place where it had become impossible for African slaves and proletarians to apply this idiom consistently.

We note also that the deep ethnocentrism of most versions of the Yorubaland myth has been diluted in Bahia. No longer is Ifè the center and origin of all mankind. In Brazil, Yoruba people were a minority, and even today the people of Yoruba faith remain subordinate to a profane and Euro-centric power structure.

Clearly, one of the reasons for the dominance of the calabash image in the Bahian "cosmogony" is the geographical origin of a large number of those enslaved. However, it is not clear why this image should have come to describe as the earliest phase of the creation, when in West Africa the union of Ọbàtálá and Odùduà is thought to have arisen only secondary to the creative impetus of Ọlórún. Taken in connection with the stress laid on mythical sanction in the regulation of marriage to be

discussed in Chapter Five, this "cosmogony" might, as Bastide suggests, be understood as a narration of, and a justification for, the Afro-Bahian's religious valorization of the conjugal and mother-centered families. It has become clear that patrilineally organized kingdoms and the Yoruba segmentary lineage system ceased being viable as a social groundwork for social organization among African people in Bahia. These forms of organization have been replaced in part by the community of the candomblés. Most of the members of the sect are women, many of whom are financially and socially independent of men. Moreover, the clergy of the most prestigious terreiros are women (see Bastide, 1978: 196, 201).

Eliade's idea of origin myths as the narration and justification of a "new situation" can be elaborated here in two ways. For one, myths' narrative aspects may be seen as not only descriptive but analytic, and, secondly, they may comprehend situations which are quite "new" and are specifically definable in non-mythic historical terms. The level at which these Yoruba cosmological conceptions are most profitably grasped by the anthropologist is as a mode of understanding in and of themselves. It seems that the myths recounted by Yoruba

in West Africa and Bahia express a profound self-understanding which is symbolic in perhaps the same sense that the present discussion is symbolic. The symbols of one are theological and indigenous to a West African society, while the symbols of the other are anthropological and native to European society.

Individual Yoruba theologians of different times and places possess varied understandings, but it is clear that the tradition is unified at some deep-lying core. Though couched in mythic terms these approaches to reality, these theories of the actual, are linked to practical endeavor. They bear on the craft of community relations which evolved amid the political and economic vicissitudes of Yoruba life. In the next two chapters, we will discuss further how these cosmological constructs accurately understand the social organizations of Yoruba people and have been used effectively to alter social circumstances. On two sides of the Atlantic, Yoruba people's conceptions of their relations to the òrìṣà have been focal.

## CHAPTER FOUR

KINSHIP, STATE, AND CULT GROUP IN YORUBALAND

In The Birth of the Gods (1960) Guy Swanson writes, "We have known for a long time that ideas about the supernatural were intimately related to the maintenance of motivation in the individual and integration in society, to the ultimate evaluations which men make of their experiences and the most fundamental bonds which unite them to each other." (1960: 189-90.) Having <sup>in the last chapter</sup> delineated<sup>^</sup> Yoruba cosmological understandings in West Africa and Bahia, we proceed to demonstrate and amend Swanson's observation. In this chapter, I hope to define the relations between Yoruba conceptions of what may dubiously be separated into natural and supernatural kinship. We will thus demonstrate the use of Yoruba theological constructs in the consolidation of the corporate and sovereign groups constituting the Empire and in apprehending the complex relations among these.

The most obvious trend in Yoruba religion is the decline of traditional cults during the rise of Islam and Christianity and concomitant with the collapse of the Yoruba state. By the time of the 1952 census, more than four-fifths of the population of the Yoruba provinces of Nigeria were said to be either Christian or Muslim