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## Gendered Agendas: The Secrets Scholars Keep about Yorùbá-Atlantic Religion

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The secret makes the sacred in the religions of the Yorùbá Atlantic.  
Writes Karin Barber,

It is by being made into a 'secret' [*awo*] that a spirit being gets its authority. It has been said, '... if we put a stone in a gourd and make a couple of taboos to stop people from looking into it, it's become an *awo* ...' Human collusion to keep the 'secret' endows the object with spiritual power: perhaps what the secret really comes down to in the end is the open secret that gods are made by men'.<sup>1</sup>

This essay concerns the role of scholars in making the secrets of the sacred, and, indeed, in remaking the boundaries and the internal hierarchies of the communities fashioned to guard those secrets.

Nation states too create boundaries and hierarchies around secrets. I am speaking not of national security secrets but of the everyday acts of dissimulation by which imagined communities energise their boundaries with popular emotional support. Nation states selectively identify certain practices and symbols of the national community as normative and define certain other commonplace behaviours and symbols as non-existent, for fear that they might reduce the nation in the eyes of powerful foreign observers.<sup>2</sup> Thus Michael Herzfeld describes what he calls 'cultural intimacy' – a sensibility that encourages state élites to propagate official visions of the nation state that exclude embarrassing aspects of national cultural life, even though these aspects of life are the focus of family feeling within the nation and the focus of many people's emotional loyalty to the national community and its state representatives.<sup>3</sup> In other words, the spokespersons of the nation state have an image to protect in the court of international public opinion and ideological priorities at odds with both popular consciousness and the inevitable cultural heterogeneity of the nation. Thus, I

might add, 'cultural intimacy' sets up a *hierarchy* within the group constituted by the secret: some members' practices are normalised, while other members' practices are branded abnormal, shameful and best kept invisible. The bearers of normalised practices assert the right to speak for the group, while everyone else is reduced to silence.

The West African tradition of *òriṣà*-worship is one among multiple religions around the Atlantic perimeter that share historical roots among the eighteenth-century ancestors of the Yorùbá. Cuban Ocha, Trinidadian Shango and the Brazilian religions of Umbanda, Xangô and Candomblé came about through the nineteenth-century dispersion of enslaved Òyó, Ègbá, Ijèṣà and Ègbádò people and others from West Africa, as well as the ongoing circuit of commerce, pilgrimage, books and scholarly debate that have, since then, continuously linked West Africa with its sons and daughters in the Americas.<sup>4</sup> In particular, Candomblé is a religion of divination, blood sacrifice, spirit possession and healing that came about chiefly in the Brazilian state of Bahia. Believers attribute miraculous powers and exemplary flaws to gods known as *orixás*, *voduns*, *inquices* and *caboclos*, depending upon the Candomblé denomination. The adventures, personalities and kinship relations of these beings are described in an extensive mythology and body of oracular wisdom, which also serve to explain the personalities and fates of their worshipers, as well as the worldly relations among those worshipers. Through blood sacrifice and lavish ceremonies of spirit possession, the gods are persuaded to intervene beneficently in the lives of their worshipers and to keep the foes of those worshipers at bay. The priests and practitioners, no less than the social scientists and politicians who seek to speak for them, tend to emphasise the ancientness of Candomblé and its constituent 'traditions'.

In this essay, however, I document a series of international dialogues – involving Afro-Brazilian priests alongside state officials and an international community of scholars – in the absence of which the massive changes in the gendered leadership of this religion over the course of the twentieth century would have been difficult to explain. Indeed, I will argue that the Candomblé religion owes not only much of its international fame but also the internal transformation of its leadership to Ruth Landes's 1947 *City of Women*, in which she offers Candomblé as a living and time-honoured example of matriarchy, available to inspire the opponents of sexism in her own native society, the United States. Yet Landes's international exposé was so influential precisely because Candomblé has been a convenient template for other scholarly and political agendas as well, ranging from Gilberto Freyre and Edison Carneiro's 'Regionalist' nationalism to Melville J. Herskovits' effort to redeem African Americans from the myth that they are cultureless and therefore inferior to whites and Oyeronkẹ Oyewumi's diasporic Yorùbá nationalism. This international array of

scholarly agendas has shifted not only the reputation but also the practice of *oriṣa* worship in the diaspora. Since the 1930s, a series of scholarly conferences uniting scholars and priests has made it increasingly important for us to acknowledge the role of scholars' interventions and cover-ups in the ongoing transformation of the Yorùbá-Atlantic religions.

Not only scholars but also political leaders of local or international standing have presented Candomblé as a metonym of the imagined communities they would invoke and lead.<sup>5</sup> Yet the realities of Candomblé in some respects resist the agendas and normative dispositions of these imagined communities, especially those of the nation state and of those who fear its judgement. For example, a silent touchstone in the transnational debates over the meaning of Candomblé and the communities it authenticates is a cultural persona who is as normal in the Candomblé priesthood as he is anathema to the normative vision of the nation state – the *adé*, or 'passive homosexual'.

The *adé* priest, like his counterparts in the African-inspired religions of Cuba and Haiti, is regarded as normal and eminently respectable by most devotees but has, since the 1930s, been summarily dismissed by an alliance of nationalist and feminist scholars as either 'untraditional' or non-existent. Yet this essay is not intended simply to correct what I believe is a wrongheaded scholarship but to observe the role of national and international scholars in canonising and, consequently, in biasing the reproduction of what are widely regarded as unchanging 'traditional' religions.

### 'The City of Women'

Ruth Landes became a great foremother of feminist anthropology by underlining the unique status accorded to women in Candomblé. Landes's feminism was transnational. She stands in a long line of twentieth-century travellers – including Margaret Mead and Simone de Beauvoir – who either found hope in international dialogue and cooperation among women or found in the women of other societies ideal models (and anti-types) of their own oppressed compatriots' liberation. Landes's 1947 title, *The City of Women*, advanced the opinion that, by tradition, women were uniquely suited to serve the Yorùbá, or Nagô, gods of Brazil. Besides the 'Nagô nation' (which is nowadays also called the 'Quêto' nation, or denomination), there were other nations in the Candomblé of Landes's day, and they endure into the present – for example, the Fon-inspired 'Jeje nation,' the 'Angola nation,' and the ever-expanding body of clergy worshipping the Indian, or *caboclo*, spirits. Landes added her voice to an ongoing tradition of privileging the Quêto/Nagô nation in particular, on the grounds of its alleged African purity and, therefore, its unique authenticity. Landes

added the claim that the Quêto/Nagô nation accorded priestly leadership exclusively to women. Thus, for Landes and her many North American fans, the Quêto/Nagô Candomblé of Salvador, Bahia, has inspired great hope as a shining example of female dominance in the real world. For this reason, she named Candomblé and its major host city 'the City of Women'.

However, Landes's research embarrassed Euro-Brazilian nationalists for two reasons – race and sexuality. First, in a country ambivalent about its demographic and cultural blackness, she studied Candomblé. Yet, as a student of anthropologist and cultural relativist Franz Boas, she studied Afro-Brazilian religion not as a racial flaw to be hidden but as proof of the richness of a transnational African legacy and, more importantly, of the potential for women's equality elsewhere in the world. The final two paragraphs of the book summarise how Landes saw her own relationship to the guardians of Brazil's international reputation:

When I left Rio for the United States, Brazilian friends escorted me to the boat, and one of them said, half teasing but with a certain defiant patriotism, 'Now you can tell them that no tigers walk in our streets.'

I nodded, and added: 'I'll tell them also about the women ... Will Americans believe that there is a country where women like men, feel secure and at ease with them, and do not fear them?'.<sup>6</sup>

In her study of Candomblé in Brazil, a country that she knew to be highly sexist, she felt that she had found evidence of what she called a 'cult matriarchate,' in which women ruled in the religious affairs, and therefore the most important affairs, of blacks in the Brazilian state of Bahia.<sup>7</sup> Arguably, however, Landes had tampered with the evidence and assumed that her audience was too far away to inspect it. Indeed, argues Healey, she had constructed a primitivist cliché.<sup>8</sup> In her search for the antipodes, for a primordial alternative to the lamented condition of her home audience and herself, she had created an other-worldly Bahia, of which she declared, 'I know by now that women are [in Bahia] the chosen sex ... I take it for granted just as I know in our world that men are the chosen sex'.<sup>9</sup> Yet, like Margaret Mead in Samoa, Landes had silenced or distorted a great deal of the evidence at her disposal.<sup>10</sup> For example, in order to account for the significant number of men leading Candomblé temples at the time of her visit, she claimed that, no matter how numerous they might be, they did not count, because they were violating 'African tradition' due to their own personal psychological problems and due to the ritual laxity of the women who had, according to Landes, only recently begun to initiate them.

Landes associated this alleged laxity chiefly with a variant of the Nagô religion in which Indian spirits, or *caboclos*, were also worshiped prominently. But given the fact that a priestess of the Nagô nation is credited

with having founded the *caboclo* cult,<sup>11</sup> that the Nagô *orixás* remained pre-eminent even in the *caboclo*-worshipping houses,<sup>12</sup> and that virtually every Nagô temple also worshiped the *caboclos*,<sup>13</sup> the categorical separation that Landes drew between the female-dominated 'Nagô' temples and the male-dominated '*caboclo*' temples seems suspiciously *a priori* and inconsistent with the self-declarations of the temple leaders.<sup>14</sup>

In fact, across all nations, including the supposedly traditionalist Nagô and Jeje nations, male leadership in the Candomblé had been an old phenomenon. Throughout the nineteenth century, men significantly outnumbered women in the Bahian Candomblé priesthood generally, and men were common in the priesthood of the supposedly all-female priesthood of the Nagô and Jeje nations as well. Indeed, the increase in *female* leadership was the more recent phenomenon.<sup>15</sup> Butler believes that a tradition of exclusively female temple leadership began in the Casa Branca, or the Ilê Iyá Nassô, temple, in the mid-nineteenth century (which, one might add, is relatively late in the documented history of Jeje and Nagô religious activity in Brazil) and that the tradition spread due to the fast-growing prestige of that particular temple among scholars and bourgeois elite sponsors.<sup>16</sup> Yet, as we shall see, the evidence of an exclusively female leadership – statistically or in principle – is ambiguous even in Casa Branca and its scions before 1930s.

In the 1930s, male priests still significantly outnumbered female priests.<sup>17</sup> Nonetheless, since the publication of Landes's work,<sup>18</sup> the scholarly advocates of Jeje and Nagô superiority have come to speak with one voice on the matter: in the Candomblé priesthood generally, 'women are the chosen sex'. Fortunately for subsequent students of Candomblé, she and her companion Edison Carneiro recorded, albeit dismissively, copious evidence against their own interpretive models. Yet Landes's interpretive model clearly changed the minds and conduct of Candomblé's leading bourgeois advocates and, consequently, the conditions of that religion's reproduction in Brazilian society.

### Grounds for dismissal: the nation state against the *adé*

Besides truth, the greatest casualty in this struggle for the possession of the sign was the *adé* – anti-hero to the territorial nation and to Landes's 'cult matriarchy' alike.<sup>19</sup> In the just cause of women's liberation, Landes played with the facts and canonised the view that women were accorded a unique status in this religion. The credibility of Landes's novel assertion that Candomblé is a matriarchy, despite demographic and historical facts to the contrary, relied on the vilification of the *adé*.

Landes's argument of images harmonised with the transnationally exported logics of North American and European nationalisms. As George

Mosse shows, homophobia is a common adjunct of nationalism.<sup>20</sup> In Landes's appeal to a counterfactual nostalgia equally typical of nationalisms, she dismissed the male presence as the result of a recent corruption. As if to confirm that the male presence was recent and non-normative, Landes reported the widespread view that all male possession priests were *adés*, or, in Landes's medico-pathological parlance, 'passive homosexuals' – that is, men who are penetrated during sexual intercourse. Thus, without reference to any indigenous discourse, Landes inaugurated the scholarly tradition of diagnosing male Candomblé priests as diseased and therefore alien to any legitimate cultural tradition.<sup>21</sup> However, as Landes herself reported, the *adés*' sexual identity seems not to have troubled the other priests or adherents of Candomblé. As priests, these men were, observed Landes, 'supported and even adored by those normal men of whom they were before the butt and object of derision'.<sup>22</sup>

Landes's revelation of these sexual matters particularly discomfited her Brazilian scholarly colleagues, even those who would have been perfectly happy for her to write about the demographic and cultural importance of black people in Brazil. These colleagues were clearly more attuned to transnational standards of national respectability and more concerned to guard the open secrets of the Brazilian nation than were the priests and subjects of Candomblé's sacred nations. Sometime Brazilian state functionary and culture-broker extraordinaire Arthur Ramos flatly denied Landes's claims about a 'cult matriarchate' and about a significant homosexual presence, and, in retaliation for Landes's divulgence, he cooperated with Melville J. Herskovits in foreclosing future professional opportunities to Landes. Landes blamed Ramos' anger over her specific revelation of 'homosexuality' for a significant part of her professional undoing.<sup>23</sup>

Though Carneiro had started out as Landes's guide, his attitudes, or at least his public discourse, about the male Candomblé possession priest changed remarkably over the course of his dialogue with Landes. In 1936, before Landes's sojourn in Bahia, Carneiro wrote of the possession priests:

In Bahia, those priestesses are called daughters-in-saint. In the olden days (and even still today), the men could be sons-in-saint too. It is noteworthy that they had to dance, during the grand festivals, wearing women's clothing.<sup>24</sup>

Throughout his 1936 publication, he casually describes male and female possession priests engaged in the same ritual duties, doing so with equal legitimacy and with equal deference from the public.

In the midst of his professional and personal relationship with Landes, he is at first quoted expressing a subtly different range of ideas and feelings, which appear to entitle 'abnormal' men to a respected and beautiful role

in the possession priesthood. Yet, apparently embarrassed by the pathologising gaze of this powerful transnational visitor, Carneiro would, within a few years correct his earlier position and end all equivocation.

We cannot say with certainty whether his was a true change of heart or a façade thrown up against a critical foreign gaze, but the fact that he presents his first full about-face in the Anglo-American *Journal of American Folk-Lore*, and an article paired with one by Ruth Landes leaves little doubt about the motive and the origin of this change. Over the course of their acquaintance, Landes seems to have changed Carneiro's mind, or at least made him answer to a homophobic transnational culture of national respectability. Having declared in 1936 to a Brazilian reading public that the male possession priesthood had originated in 'the olden days' and even continued today, Carneiro chose later to tell the US reading public.

It seems that formerly the *candomblé* was a woman's business ... The ascendancy of women dates from the introduction of the *candomblés* in Bahia, with the establishment of the Nagô house of [Casa Branca do] Engenho Velho about 1830 ... As against so many 'mothers,' we know of the existence of only a few 'fathers,' like Bambuxê and 'Uncle' Joaquim ... Despite the superior importance of women in *candomblé*, today the number of 'fathers' and 'mothers' is equal.<sup>25</sup>

Thus Carneiro had literally reversed the course of history. This English-language publication is also the first in which Carneiro systematically lambastes the male possession priests, condemning them for 'giving themselves up to homosexuality, where they take the passive role, dropping into the small gossip typical of lower-class women'. Of Bahian public opinion toward the 'homosexual' priests, Carneiro tells the USA, 'criticism is always more venomous about "fathers" than about "mothers", labelling them insincere, dishonest, and evil'.<sup>26</sup> His condemnation even exceeds that of Landes, who, as we have seen, acknowledges the support and admiration that 'passive' male possession priests receive from 'normal men'.<sup>27</sup>

To summarise, in 1936, Carneiro wrote of male priests as normal. In their early dialogue during the late 1930s, Landes quoted Carneiro voicing admiration for the beauty of the 'abnormal' male homosexual priests and the liveliness of *caboclo*-worship. It was first in 1940, before a US audience, that Carneiro would excommunicate these men from the authentic regional and national folklore. By 1948, in a publication for the Museum of the State of Bahia, he was prepared to denounce the male priesthood before the Brazilian national public.

He did so in *Candomblés da Bahia* (1948), a decade after their collaboration had begun and after Landes's two major publications on the subject, in 1940 and 1947. With his region and his religious friends under the spotlight of international scrutiny, Carneiro moved to rescue the reputation of the supposedly *authentic* Candomblé with the unsubstantiated

claim that the Candomblé priesthood had once been exclusively female. Following Landes, he established the canonical view in Brazilian and Brazilianist folklore studies, and even in the historical consciousness of many priestly élites, that male priests are uniquely disreputable, that their numerical predominance is recent, and, therefore, that they are unrepresentative of the authentic folklore of the Northeastern region and of the Brazilian nation. Carneiro added that these allegedly new male priests belonged to what he considered the least representative and respectable of Candomblé nations – the Angola, Congo and Caboclo nations.<sup>28</sup>

Carneiro had a special stake in dignifying the West African Nagô and Jeje nations and in guarding them from derogation by the national and transnational public. Carneiro was affiliated with the Northeastern Regionalists, who sought to rescue their region from its reputation as inferior on account of its relative poverty and of its black and mulatto majority. At the turn of the century, state officials inspired by eugenics had invested enormous resources in recruiting European immigrants to whiten the population of the Centre-South state of São Paulo, which had also industrialised itself with the profits of its lucrative and initially slave-based coffee plantations. Advocates of the superseded and underdeveloped Northeast argued that, though their region was poorer and blacker, its blacks and mulattoes were superior (on account of their disproportionately West African Nagô and Jeje origins) to those of the Centre-South (whose origins were mainly West-Central African – e.g. Congo and Angola). A Northeastern mulatto himself, Carneiro had a personal and political stake in doing whatever it took to preserve the dignity of the Nagô and Jeje nations and to make theirs the standard by which the typical folk religion of his region was judged. Thus, nostalgia for the Jeje-Nagô-centered, putatively matriarchal and innocent pre-history of Candomblé came to unite the spokespersons of two imagined communities – Northeastern Regionalist Édison Carneiro and transnational feminist Ruth Landes.

Yet the copious detail in his 1948 volume frequently undermines his own tendentious argument that the Nagô nation is exclusively or in principle matriarchal. For example, Carneiro credits the nineteenth-century African-born priest Bambuxê (Bamgbose) with initiating Aninha, the future chief priestess of the prestigious Ilê Axé Opô Afonjá temple. Aninha's disappointment that another man, Joaquim Vieira, did not succeed the recently deceased chief-priestess of Casa Branca, the mother church of Bahia's pre-eminent family of Quêto/Nagô temples, is given as the reason for Aninha's secession from the Casa Branca temple in the first place and for her role in the founding of Opô Afonjá. Finally, even though the histories recounted nowadays at Opo Afonja seem to leave no doubt that Aninha founded that temple and was its first chief priest, Carneiro actually reports



that the male priest Pai Joaquim had been that temple's first 'chief'.<sup>29</sup> Carneiro documented the esteemed leadership of the Yorùbá/Nagô babalawo diviners Martiniano do Bonfim and Felisberto Sowzer, who are not possession priests. But he also mentions in passing numerous eminent male possession priests of the Jeje and Nagô nations who were alive during his time, such as Eduardo Mangabeira, Procópio, Manuel Falefá, Manuel Menez, Cosme, Antônio Bonfim and Otacílio.<sup>30</sup> Despite all the contrary evidence that he himself recorded, Carneiro's synoptic statements about the 'tradition' seem aimed to satisfy the same partisan notions of respectability that Landes invoked. Not even the most gymnastic and speculative argument was barred in the effort to dismiss the male priests and thereby guarantee the international respectability of an 'authentic' tradition left by their absence.

Landes's transnational feminism and Carneiro's efforts in the Regionalist project thus conspired to keep a secret. Yet Carneiro had not thought of Candomblé's 'passive homosexuals' as much of a secret before 1938. The *adés* first became a secret amid the conflict between North American Ruth Landes and Brazilian academic gatekeeper Arthur Ramos. A close observer of Bahia and a close friend of Landes's, Carneiro could not deny the newly embarrassing reality, as Ramos had done, but he was in a position to marginalise that reality authoritatively. A half-century after the publication of *The City of Women* (1947) and *Candomblés da Bahia* (1948), women have, in fact, now become the majority of the chief priests in this religion.<sup>31</sup>

### The cultural logic of 'passivity'

First in 1988 and then at a Yorùbá conference in 1999, I publicly proposed an explanation for the locally perceived normalcy of 'passive homosexuals,' or *adés*, as possession priests and therefore as the heads of Candomblé temples.<sup>32</sup> The debate it engendered demonstrates that Regionalist, nationalist and international feminist communities are not the only ones that are continually transformed, in a cosmopolitan context, by the gaze of other imagined communities and by the nationalist silencing of certain home-grown realities. The African Diaspora too is constituted by certain open secrets, and can be reconstituted by re-selections and re-readings of what secrets need to be defended.

There are no reliable statistics on how many Candomblé priests engage in what Landes called 'passive homosexuality'. Nor does my thesis concern their actual numbers. Rather, I have sought to understand why so many members and cognoscenti of Candomblé assume – with or without statistical accuracy – that male initiates in the possession priesthood are normally *adés*, why many Afro-Brazilian men who love men feel at home

in Candomblé, and why Candomblé-inspired terminology dominates the argot of gays all over urban Brazil.

Today there are numerous explanations of *adés*' alleged prominence among Candomblé possession priests. But before we can understand them, we must identify the set of semantic contrasts of which the 'passive homosexual' is a part in Brazil. On the one hand, English-speaking North Americans tend to distinguish sharply between those men who engage in sex with other men ('homosexuals') and those who do not ('heterosexuals'). On the other hand, Brazilians are far more likely to distinguish men who penetrate others during sexual intercourse (*homens*, or '[real] men') from those who are penetrated (*bichas*, *viados* or, in Candomblé language, *adés*).<sup>33</sup> Brazilians share the basics of this pattern of classification with many peoples around the Mediterranean, as well as much of pre-nineteenth-century Europe, Native America and most of the rest of the world.<sup>34</sup> Contemporary European and Anglo-American prison populations and sailors seem no exception.<sup>35</sup> Even when the Bahians I know use the term 'homosexual', most are referring only to the party in sexual intercourse who is assumed to be habitually penetrated, or 'passive.' Of course, the real behaviour of both *homens* and *bichas*, or *adés*, is regularly more varied than what is stereotypically attributed to them, and the normative assumption that the 'active' party is dominant in the sexual act and in the non-sexual dimensions of the social relationship is often more fantasy than material reality.<sup>36</sup> However, local *ideological* assumptions and expectations tend to link habitual male 'passivity' in sexual intercourse with transvestism, feminine gestures, feminine occupations and the social subordination of the penetrated party.<sup>37</sup>

So why do many Brazilians think there is a connection between the possession priesthood and so-called 'sexual passives'?<sup>38</sup> Peter Fry suggests that the shared classification of male 'passives' and possession cults as 'deviant' makes the priesthood an appropriate niche for homosexuals. Following Victor Turner and Mary Douglas, Fry argues that the homosexuals' *liminal* status in Brazilian national society suits them symbolically, in the Brazilian popular imagination, to professions dealing with 'magical power.'<sup>39</sup> Lima moves in the direction of acknowledging what is *normal* about homosexuality in Candomblé ideology: both Afro-Brazilian religions and Brazilian Kardecist Spiritism, he argues, have shown themselves more generally *tolerant* than the Roman Catholic church.<sup>40</sup> More to the point, Birman reports that men whose heads are governed by female divinities and sex-changing gods – like Iançã, Oxum, Oxumaré and Logunedé – are expected to share in the female dispositions and desires of those gods.<sup>41</sup> Thus, according to Candomblé's indigenous personality theory, the homosexuality of male priests is in their 'natures' (*naturezas*), is derived from 'nature' (*natureza*), and is authorised by the sacred – hence their attraction to and acceptance in Candomblé.

Fry also notes the advantageous flexibility enjoyed by *bichas*, or 'passives,' in the performance of social roles normally reserved, in the wider society, primarily for one sex or the other. That is, they can acceptably do the cooking and embroidering necessary for the temple and yet, in a similar religion in Belém do Pará (where Fry conducted his research), retain the social advantages of men in transactions with the 'world of men' – of police, judges, doctors, lawyers and politicians, 'whose services they themselves may use or broker to clients for their own advantage'.<sup>42</sup> In the Bahian case, men's advantages over the great Nagô mothers in this regard are not so evident. What is more evident, and is observed by Leão Teixeira, is that homosexual men bring to the Candomblé three other advantages over women: (1) the higher average earnings of men and (2) their ritual licence as men to perform all the *ritual* duties normally *restricted* to men, such as the sacrifice of four-legged animals, and the care of the all-important Exú (god of sex, mischief and communication), Ossaim (god of herbal medicine), and the Eguns (ancestral spirits); and (3) men's immunity to the restrictions placed upon menstruating women, such as the prohibition against their entering the shrine rooms.<sup>43</sup> A woman consecrated to a male god is eligible to receive a further initiation (*mão de faca*) that entitles her to sacrifice birds, but, while menstruating, she cannot even do that.<sup>44</sup>

My point is that what Landes called Candomblé's 'cult matriarchate' is not a fact given simply by 'tradition'; nor is it simply a lie. It is a plausible but *interested* and *contested construction* of 'tradition' based upon a cosmopolitan repertoire of precedents and interpretive logics. It is also the product of various imagined communities' fear of outside judgment or pursuit of an ideal model of community for themselves. And despite the pronounced homophobia of many contemporary Third-World bourgeois nationalists (including a number of prominent Anglophone African élites<sup>45</sup>), one would be hard-pressed to locate the pre-colonial, 'traditional' Yorùbá precedents for the homophobia that Landes, Ribeiro and Bastide have presented as psychoanalytic proof of male priests' inferiority. The homophobia that de-normalises *adés*, or 'passives,' in the Candomblé priesthood has its origins not in an aboriginal Africa but in nationalisms and a particular brand of transnational feminism of the mid-twentieth century.

A word of caution before proceeding to the second point: this argument must not be mistaken for the plainly false claim that all transnational feminists or all Brazilian nationalists are homophobic. Such a misreading would misconstrue the nature of imagined communities and their leadership. Demagogues are the most extreme example of leaders who, by making bold, vivid and distinctive pronouncements, capture the imagination of large populations and thereby rearrange people's sense of where the boundaries of the community lie, how its internal hierarchies are arrayed, and what the shared purpose of the community is. However, not even the

most capable demagogues win the unanimous agreement or consent of their target populations. Rather, demagogues become centres of gravity in target populations that often have multiple centres of gravity. Gilberto Freyre, Arthur Ramos, Édison Carneiro and Ruth Landes are hardly demagogues, but Freyre, Ramos and Carneiro are important centres of gravity in the Regionalist imagination of the Brazilian national community, just as Landes is an important centre of gravity in the transnational feminist imagination of community. While her homophobia is accidental to the entirely rightful feminist aspiration to gender equality (and, once detected, anathema to the principles of most feminists I know), her particular discursive strategy and the Regionalists' fear of the transnational gaze have deeply compromised the status of the *adé* priest in Northeastern Brazil.

The proliferation of latter-day explanations of the prominence of *adés* in the Brazilian Candomblé, Cuban Ocha and Haitian Vodou priesthoods, and the well-documented history of Candomblé adherents' comfort with *adés* in this role, appear to share a common root. That root is evident between the lines of Landes's informants' testimony in the 1930s and most clearly implied by my own comparative field research between Brazilian Candomblé and its West African 'homeland'. I will argue here, as I have argued elsewhere, that a West African logic of 'mounting' and its attendant transvestism converged in Brazil with a Brazilian logic of sexuality and social hierarchy, thereby helping us to understand why, in Brazil, male Candomblé possession priests are widely believed to be *bichas*, *adés* or 'passive homosexuals'.<sup>46</sup> Thus, mine is an argument about the local 'reinterpretation', to borrow Herskovits' term, of cultural forms that appear in diverse but historically connected places.<sup>47</sup> It is, in short, a case study of syncretism, in which the transnational community of scholars is one of the stakeholders in the reinterpretation (and agents in the transformation) of local cultures.

### **Mounted men: what Nigerian male ẹlẹgùn and New-World 'passive' priests do and do not have in common<sup>48</sup>**

Ọyó-Yorùbá people formed not only a plurality of the African captives taken to Bahia in the nineteenth century but also the founding priests and priestesses of Bahia's most influential temples – including Casa Branca. No African ethnic group has influenced Candomblé more than this Yorùbá subgroup.

In West Africa, Ọyó-Yorùbá worshipers employ multiple metaphors to evoke the nature of people's relationships to the gods. Like Brazilian Candomblé adherents, West African Yorùbá worshipers of the ọriṣà gods might call any devotee of a god the 'child' (*omọ* [Yorùbá]; *filho* [Portuguese]) of that god. In both traditions, motherhood and fatherhood are used as

metaphors of leadership in the worship and activation of the gods. For example, a senior male West African Yorùbá priest of, say, Ẓàngó might be addressed as *Bàbá OníẒàngó* ('Father [or Senior Male] Owner-of-Ẓàngó'); a senior priestess would be addressed as *Íyá OníẒàngó* ('Mother [or Senior Female] Owner-of-Ẓàngó'). In Brazil, the male head of a Candomblé temple is called a *pai-de-santo* ('father-of-divinity'), while a chief priestess is called a *mãe-de-santo* ('mother-of-divinity').

Yet the Yorùbá terms that mark out the priest's competency to embody the god through possession-trance and to act as the god's worldly delegate rely, above all, upon allied metaphors of marriage and sexuality. According to Édison Carneiro, as we shall see, these metaphors were very much alive in the Brazilian Candomblé of the 1930s, and they were consciously present in local understandings of both male and female participation in the priesthood. In the speech of many twenty-first century Brazilian *orixá*-worshippers these metaphors are now dead or dying. Yet the 'death' of a metaphor seldom means that it has lost its effectiveness in communicative acts; instead, its implications have often become naturalised, implicit and pervasive rather than poetic, novel and conscious. In present-day Brazilian Candomblé, metaphors of marriage and sexuality stand powerfully alongside metaphors of parenthood and birth in the often-contested representation and reproduction of the priesthood.

Most Ọyó-Yorùbá possession priests in West Africa are women. The numerous male possession priests, on the other hand, cross-dress. But their cross-dressing requires a culture-specific reading. They dress not as 'women' but as 'wives' or 'brides' (*iyàwó*) – a term that otherwise refers only to the women married to worldly men. Novices to the priesthood – whether male or female – are designated metaphorically as *iyàwó*, meaning 'brides' or 'wives'.<sup>49</sup> The degree to which Bahians understand the word *iaô* to mean 'wife' or 'bride' has declined since the 1930s, but the implications of its Yorùbá meaning upon the logic of priestly recruitment have echoed into the third millennium.

For months after the initiation, male and female novices among the West African Ọyó-Yorùbá wear women's clothes: *iró* (wrap skirts), *bùbá* (blouses), and *òjá* (baby-carrying slings); on ceremonial occasions, they also wear *tiro* (antimony eyeliner), *làálì* (henna for the hands and feet), delicate bracelets, earrings and so forth. As mature priests, or *elégùn*, women and men braid their hair, and follow the latest styles in women's coiffures. But, on ceremonial occasions, they *also* continue to don *tiróò* eyeliner, henna and delicate jewellery. Many uninitiated Yorùbá women do these things but, male possession priests are virtually the only men who do so. In the Ọyó-Yorùbá town where I conducted my principal West African field research, Ìgbòhò, both the strip-weaving of cloth and bar-keeping are considered female professions. So, almost predictably,

the only male strip-weaver and the only male bar-keeper in the town are Šàngó possession priests. Thus, West African Šàngó priests present themselves ritually, sartorially and verbally not as women *per se* but as wives of the gods, *by analogy to the female wives of earthly husbands*. This extended metaphor includes a further important term.

Indeed, the most pervasive and dramatic gendered symbol in this metaphoric representation of the possession priests' relationship to the gods – from the initiation onward – is the complex web of metaphors implicit in the Yorùbá verb *gùn* – meaning 'to mount.' Indeed, the term for 'possession priest' (*ẹ̀lẹ̀gùn*) means 'the mounted one'. *Gùn* refers to what a *rider does to a horse* (hence, possession priests are sometimes called 'horses of the gods' [*ẹ̀şin òrìşà*]). The term *gùn* also refers to what an animal or a brutal man does sexually to his female partner (and possession by Šàngó is often spoken of as a brutal act).<sup>50</sup> The term *gùn* also refers to what a god – especially Šàngó – does to his possession priests. And Šàngó's is the most influential possession priesthood not only on the Bight of Benin but also, to an even greater extent, among the *orixá*-worshippers of Brazil, Cuba, Trinidad and the United States. However we translate the verb *gùn* into English, the term *montar* in Caribbean Spanish and Brazilian Portuguese and the Haitian Kweyòl term *monte* (all cognates of the English verb 'to mount'), encode the same three referents – sexual penetration, horsemanship and spirit possession – and have a long history of usage by worshippers in Cuba, Brazil and Haiti.

Let me illustrate how Afro-Latin Americans – such as the priests and cognoscenti of the Bahian Candomblé – consciously construed these West African Yorùbá metaphors in the 1930s, at the time of Landes's research in Bahia. These are the words of journalist and long-term Candomblé affiliate Édison Carneiro early in his acquaintance with Ruth Landes:

Sometimes they call a priestess the *wife* of a god, and sometimes she is his *horse*. The god gives advice and places demands, but often he just *mounts* and plays.

So you can see why the priestesses develop great influence among the people. They are the pathway to the gods. But no *upright* man will allow himself to be *ridden* by a god, unless he does not care about *losing his manhood* ...

Now here's the loophole. Some men do *let themselves be ridden*, and they become priests with the women; but they are known to be *homosexuals*. In the temple they *put on skirts and mannerisms of the women* ... Sometimes *they are much better-looking than the women* (Landes 1947: 37).

This parlance is highly consistent with the West African, Òyó-Yorùbá symbolism of spirit possession I observed among Nigerian Šàngó priests of both sexes in the 1980s, save one important detail: the reluctance of 'real men' to be possessed in the Brazilian Candomblé.

Sex was not an infrequent topic of conversation among male friends of my age group in Ìgbòho, and, no matter what their age, the Şàngó priests in the town were vocal and ribald in their humour about the matter. Yet I never became aware of any commonly used vocabulary in Ọ̀yọ́-Yorùbá language to distinguish 'upright men' from a category of men who are 'homosexual' or somehow like women. I have never heard any West African *òrìṣà* priest speak of himself or his fellow priests as anything like a 'homosexual' or as engaging in same-sex intercourse. I argue simply that the Afro-Brazilians have *re-interpreted* West African metaphors of spirit possession in the light of Brazilian gender categories. For many Brazilians in the 1930s and now, submission to a god's agency has seemed analogous to sexual 'passivity,' or the experience of being penetrated during sexual intercourse. In other words, a physically mountable man seems highly qualified, in a symbolic sense, to be mounted spiritually. The metaphor-ridden 'loophole' by which Édison Carneiro and his priestly friends understood men to have recently entered the Yorùbá/Quêto/Nagô possession priesthood in the 1930s was virtually identical – in both its terms and its emphases – to the *dominant* logic of the Ọ̀yọ́-Yorùbá Şàngó priesthood that I observed in the 1980s and others had observed since as long as that West African priesthood has been written about.<sup>51</sup>

Were it not for the increasingly vocal homophobia of Anglophone African bourgeoisies and the hot-button nature of sex as an object of cultural intimacy among nationalists, my argument would be not only better substantiated but also little more controversial than Herskovits' view that 'shouting' in black North American churches is a 'reinterpretation' of African spirit possession.<sup>52</sup> It would be little more controversial than explaining how the *idòbálẹ̀* and the *iyíkàá* salutes in Cuba and Brazil reinterpret similar gestures in West Africa. That is, among the West African Yorùbá, *men* prostrate themselves flat on the ground, while the *iyíkàá* (lying first on one side and then on the other) is the more appropriate gesture for *women* in sacred contexts. In Cuban Ocha and Brazilian Candomblé, by contrast, it is the gender of one's divinity, or 'saint', that determines the appropriate style of self-prostration. Whether male or female, a person governed by a male saint salutes elders and altars with the *idòbálẹ̀*, whereas a male or female person governed by a female saint performs the *iyíkàá*.

I have never said or believed that the West African transvestite priests were or are in any sense homosexual.<sup>53</sup> While many have embraced my argument as logical and empirically sound, some others have found it easy to misinterpret, either as (1) proof that homosexuality is as widespread and natural in Africa as it is in the West, or as (2) a defamation of authentic, 'traditional' Yorùbá culture.<sup>54</sup> The first proposition is beyond the scope of my argument and of the evidence that I present here.<sup>55</sup> The

second misinterpretation is the subject of the next section. But, first, a parenthesis.

At the time of my research in Ìgbòho, I had never heard of a named or symbolically marked category of men who are penetrated *sexually* by other men, but, in sum, I could see that those who are regularly penetrated *spiritually* by the gods have a great deal in common (sartorially, professionally and symbolically) with the Brazilian *bicha* or *adé* category. Imagine my surprise when I made the acquaintance of a highly respected Yorùbá art historian from Òyó, whose extended family included many Šàngó priests in that West African cultural capital. During his time among *oricha*-worshippers in the United States, this scholar too became aware of the importance of men who love men in the New-World priesthoods. Without having read my work, he had concluded that male-male sexual conduct among New World priests was a *continuation* rather than a mere reinterpretation of West African religious traditions. He told me that, on two occasions between 1968 and 1973, he witnessed possessed male Šàngó priests anally penetrating unpossessed male priests in an Òyó shrine. He does not know, however, if this practice was widespread or whether it represented a tradition or norm. Nor do I. As yet, I would extend my case no further based upon this unique testimony, which the original observer has shared with me privately but has himself – with a sense of ‘cultural intimacy’ – hesitated to publish.

### The controversy

Dozens of Yorùbá scholars have written with sharpness and clarity about gender and gender relations in Yorùbá religion and culture generally.<sup>56</sup> However, these discussions have acquired new dimensions and new content as the number of Yorùbá scholars in the diaspora, and the occasions for their interaction with New-World priests of the Cuban *orichas*, Brazilian *orixás* and African-American orishas have increased. In this context, my argument has recently sparked controversy in a new, diasporic community – that of Yorùbá scholars and New-World priestesses of Yorùbá religion in the USA. It also seems to have provoked new questions about who legitimately belongs to the imagined community of this ‘world religion’ and who does not, who should speak for it and who is silenced, which practices are canonised and which ones are branded abnormal, shameful and best kept invisible.

One Yorùbá scholar in the United States, sociologist Oyeronke Oyewumi, read my argument and then, in print, accused me of describing the West African possession priests as ‘drag queens’ and ‘actual if not symbolic homosexuals’.<sup>57</sup> Oyewumi is clearly less interested in summarising my argument than in expressing her deep offence and her own preference to classify ‘homosexuals’ as anathema to this new Yorùbá diasporic nationalism.



This caricature of my argument was but one link in Oyewumi's argument that there is no gender whatsoever in authentic Yorùbá culture. Writes Oyewumi, 'Yorùbá is a non-gender-specific language'<sup>58</sup> which she takes as evidence that 'gender was not an organizing principle in Yorùbá society prior to colonization by the West'<sup>59</sup> and that 'Yorùbá society did not make gender distinctions and instead made age distinctions'.<sup>60</sup> People's anatomical sex 'did not privilege them to any social positions and similarly did not jeopardize their access'.<sup>61</sup> The physical differences between men and women mattered, 'only in regard to procreation, where they must'.<sup>62</sup>

Oyewumi's language-based inferences about the Yorùbá people's distant past slip, without explanation, into counterfactually present-tense assertions about 'the Yorùbá frame of reference',<sup>63</sup> as though the alleged precolonial genderlessness of the Yorùbá's ancestors represents the underlying core and essence of a cultural system that has only recently, and at its margins, become sexist due to foreign influence.<sup>64</sup> In fact, once Oyewumi has defined a social ideal that she senses must have prevailed during a period before there were written records to prove or disprove it, she defines all of the numerous exceptions, past and present, as the products of Western contamination.<sup>65</sup>

Oyewumi argues, in sum, that colonisation by the West is the origin of all the sexism and, indeed, of all the gender conceptions that exist in Yorùbáland today, and that, because English language continuously marks the gender of its human referents, conventional scholarly discourse in English consistently misrepresents the gender-free culture of the Yorùbá. Ungendered features of the Yorùbá language are taken as proof that the culture in general was once and still is, in its essence, both non-sexist and free of any form of gender differentiation. Therefore, argues Oyewumi, Yorùbá and non-Yorùbá scholars who see gender in Yorùbá cultural history do so simply because they have falsely translated the gender-neutral terms of Yorùbá language into the gender-specific terms of the English language. Oyewumi therefore regards such scholars as thus both victims and agents of Western imperialism.<sup>66</sup>

Oyewumi's argument is passionate and persuasive to some New World priests and to many scholars – hence the extensive attention it merits in this article. Yet much of its persuasiveness lies in its misrepresentation of the existing scholarship on gender and on Yorùbá society, which, at least since the 1970s, has highlighted the differences between Western and Yorùbá gender roles. As I will show in this section, Oyewumi's attention to linguistic and ethnographic evidence is selective to the point of misrepresenting Yorùbá cultural history. More importantly, for the sake of this historical analysis of scholarship and society, the reader will see that her rhetorical strategy – including the silences it keeps – shares structural similarities with nationalist discourses the world over.

Like Brazilian nationalist Gilberto Freyre, Oyewumi turns the tables on North American and Western European cultural and racial chauvinism. She does so, however, not through the Freyrean style vivid storytelling but by constructing an antipodean difference between 'the West' and 'the Yorùbá conception'. In 'the West', argues Oyewumi, everything about a person's social status is determined by his or her visible biology (in which Oyewumi includes a person's genotype) – that is, according to Oyewumi, by a person's race and sex. Oyewumi then defines 'gender' as the allegedly 'Western' notion that every aspect of an anatomical female's life is determined by her anatomy, that no cross-cutting identity or category of social belonging (such as kinship, age or marital status) shapes any anatomical female's social role or status, that every anatomical female is always socially inferior to every anatomical male, that an anatomical female may perform no roles that anatomical males also perform, that the gender categories are determined entirely by the referent's visible or chromosomal biology. Moreover, despite her citation of several scholarly works that discuss third genders or relational gender, she argues that the analytic term 'gender' always imposes a binary or dichotomy upon its referents.<sup>67</sup>

On the basis of this unusual definition of 'gender' and a somewhat unempirical assessment of 'Western' social life, Oyewumi asserts that 'gender' prevails in the West, but not in Yorùbá society. Only one's age relative to other people and the family to which one belongs, the author concludes, determine anything about one's social status and relationships in authentically Yorùbá society.

In evidence, the author cites the extensive gender coding of pronouns, names, kinship terms, and occupational terms in English, as well as numerous Yorùbá pronouns, kinship terms, and occupational terms that, in her opinion, do not encode gender – such as *òun* ('s/he'), *omò* ('child'), *ègbón* ('senior sibling or cousin'), *oba* ('monarch'), *Ìyá Olóríjẹ* ('Food Vendor' [lit., 'Senior-Female Owner-of-Food']), and *Bàbá Aláṣọ* ('clothier' or 'weaver' [lit., 'Senior-Male Owner-of-Cloth']). Oyewumi spends much of her argument explaining away or concealing the gender coding that actually does appear in these and other Yorùbá terms and social practice. For example, there are clearly words in Yorùbá for 'male' (*akọ*), 'female' (*abọ*), 'man' (*òkùnrin*), and 'woman' (*obinrin*). The terms of address and reference for parents, senior relatives, senior strangers, and people of almost every occupation indicate the referent's gender – as in *Bàbá Ayò* (the teknonymic 'Father of Ayò'), *Bàbá Èlérán* ('butcher'), and *Ìyáà mi* ('Mommy'). Most professions in Yorùbáland have and have long had vastly more of one sex than another practising them, and virtually all social clubs (*ẹgbé*) are segregated according to sex. Certain Yorùbá religious and political titles are strongly gender-marked, despite their infrequent adoption by a person of the other sex, such as *babaláwo* (a type of divination

priest [lit., 'senior-male-who-owns-the-mystery']), *baalè* (non-royal quarter or town chief [lit., 'father of the land']), and *baálé* (head of residential compound [lit., 'father of the house']). But as far as I know, a man can never be an *iyálé* (eldest wife of the house [lit., 'mother of the house']). It should be noted that these last two terms – *baálé* and *iyálé* – are *etymologically* distinguished from each other *only* by the gender of the referent. Yet *in real social life* the persons described as 'fathers of the house' rank far higher in the house than do the people called 'mothers of the house'.

On the other hand, one of the most important chieftaincies of the nineteenth-century was that of the *iyálóde* (the Chief of the Market [lit., 'Mother-Who-Owns-the-Outside']), and, as far as I know, this title has never been held by a man. Oyewumi argues that the *iyálóde* title originated in the nineteenth century and was a product of influence by Ìbàdàn, an ethnically Oyo-Yorùbá military republic.<sup>68</sup> She does not demonstrate, however, the sense in which its gender-specificity results from foreign or Western influence or is foreign to 'the Yorùbá conception'. She also argues that, because not all women fell under the authority of the *iyálóde* and the *iyálóde* governed affairs beyond the affairs of women, the title is not gendered. I fail to see how this evidence proves that a title reserved for women escapes analysis in terms of gender.

Moreover, the fact that there are a few female *baálè*, or 'village chiefs', near Oyewumi's hometown should not allow us to overlook the male gendering of authority that the term implies, especially if Oyewumi intends to be true to her hypothesis that vocabulary reveals the culture-specific ideology underlying statistics of otherwise unclear implications. In this case, contrary to her general argument, Oyewumi chooses to privilege the statistic of the exception over the linguistically implicit ideology of male dominance.<sup>69</sup>

This is a society in which men and women have long worn markedly different styles of clothing, a wife is regularly expected to supply her husband with cooked food (and not vice-versa), almost all professional cooks (except in European-style establishments) are women, and the social norms of legitimate reproduction differentially affect the experience of anatomical males and females throughout the life-cycle. in ways ranging from infant clitoridectomy to earlier marriage for women than for men, bridewealth, polygyny (and the unthinkability of polyandry), viri-patrilocal postmarital residence, the levirate and the normatively different roles of mothers and fathers in childcare. Oyewumi even makes the credible claim that motherhood is the most honoured of Yorùbá institutions, but, given her peculiar definition of 'gender,' this observation is taken to illustrate the absence of gender in Yorùbá society.<sup>70</sup> The author also claims that polygyny is frequently initiated by the existing wife, that male interests are not supreme in polygynous marriages, that married women's sexual dalliances are tacitly accepted, and that husbands have no rights over the

wife's labour. These indications of wifely 'agency,' alongside Oyewumi's argument that polygyny entails male self-discipline and deprivation, are taken to prove that polygyny is 'ungendered'.<sup>71</sup> Most of Oyewumi's claims are inconsistent with my observations in Oyo North, Ibadan and Lagos during the 1980s and 1990s, and with others' observations during the past two centuries. Even if they were true, however, the claim that they prove an absence of gender in Yorùbá culture follows more from Oyewumi's idiosyncratic definition of gender than from a careful assessment of the empirical data on Yorùbá marriage. They also fail to reflect the full complexity of the scholarship on 'gender' in Western marriage and social life.

The levirate (or 'widow-inheritance') is no longer commonly practiced in Yorùbáland, but the archival records of the Customary Courts during the early colonial period demonstrate, contrary to Oyewumi's claim, that it was often practised without the widow's consent.<sup>72</sup> Records from just before the colonial period indicate that adultery was often severely punished by indigenous authorities, and women were sometimes forced, on threat of violence, to remain in marriages that they wished to leave.<sup>73</sup> Oyewumi fails to produce any documentation of her claims that Yorùbá marriage does not and did not, throughout its documented history, entail systematically different social experiences for the male and female partners. The statistical and ideological norm that a wife moves to her husband's natal household and enters as a subordinate to every person previously born to or married into that household is a structural disadvantage that affects most women in this society *because* they are women and not men. These facts cannot easily be dismissed.

Oyewumi focuses great attention upon linguistic evidence because any claim that present-day Yorùbá culture and society fail to distinguish men from women, or offer them equal access and privileges to important social options, is manifestly false. Hence, Oyewumi claims that her analysis reconstructs the *real* Yorùbá culture, which preceded colonisation and/or the slave trade, a period to which we have hardly any documentary access. The earliest document the author consults is dated 1829, long after the slave trade had begun to affect the Òyò-Yorùbá, and the author elides all historical periods that preceded the slave trade and colonisation (including several unmentioned centuries of Islamic influence) into a single 'authentic' prototype, which she believes remains evident and alive only in those aspects of present-day Yorùbá parlance that do not mark gender.

When evidently old gender-marked aspects of Yorùbá language are addressed at all, they are excused by various arguments that would obviously be absurd if applied to languages and cultures more familiar to the reader. For example, *bàbá* ('father' or 'senior man') and *ìyá* ('mother' or 'senior woman') are said to indicate not only sex but *also*

adulthood; therefore they are not gendered, argues Oyewumi. Does it follow, then, that the terms 'father' and 'mother' in English are not gendered?

Oyewumi argues that the term for 'bride' or 'wife' (*iyawo*) is ungendered because it refers to both the female brides of worldly husbands and possession priests regardless of sex. Does the fact that the church is called the 'bride of Christ' in English then imply that the English term 'bride' is also ungendered? Is the church not made up of males and females?

The fact that a fruitful year is called a 'female year' (*abo ọ̀dun*) is said not to indicate any Yorùbá conception of gender because, Oyewumi reports falsely, no one speaks of its opposite as a 'male year' (*ako ọ̀dun*).<sup>74</sup> Even if the statement were true, its logic would imply that the term 'phallic symbol' in English is ungendered because there is no commonplace word for its feminine opposite.

In English, as in Yorùbá, one could recite an endless list of gender-free references to people without ever proving that the language or the culture is gender-free. Could one reliably infer from the gender-neutral English terms 'I', 'you', 'we', 'they', 'parent', 'cousin', 'sibling', 'child' and 'president' that Anglo-Saxon or Western language and culture are in their essence or once were free of gender and of gender hierarchy? I think not. But this is the logic of Oyewumi's linguistic argument that Yorùbá culture, in its deep past and in its present essence, is completely without gender.

Oyewumi's linguistic argument simply does not stand up to sustained ethnographic investigation, as the work of important Yorùbá scholars demonstrates. For example, Wande Abimbola offers an overview of the images of women in the ancient Ifá literary corpus, the carefully preserved basis of the Ifá oracular system and, arguably, the centrepiece of Yorùbá 'traditional' culture as most Yorùbá people understand it. These texts have existed for centuries and, though they are not static, they undoubtedly preserve a great deal of social history from pre-nineteenth-century times, which would hardly disappear from an overview by a scholar and *babaláwo* of Abimbola's competency and standing. He is the official spokesman (*Àwíṣẹ̀*) of the Ifá priesthood headquartered at Ilé-Ifẹ̀. Indeed, Abimbola's assessment both relies on stronger evidence of the Yorùbá past and strongly contradicts Oyewumi's argument that Yorùbá culture in no way represents anatomical men and anatomical women as socially or morally different. For example, according to Abimbola, a world-renowned Òyó-Yorùbá *babaláwo*, Ifá represents only women as capable of being an *àjé*, which he defines as 'a blood-sucking, wicked, dreadful cannibal who transforms herself into a bird at night and flies to distant places, to hold nocturnal meetings with her fellow witches who belong to a society that excludes all men'.<sup>75</sup> On the one hand, Ifá credits women uniquely with the marvellous capacity to bear children and to be

loyal wives. On the other hand, it represents women as deceitful. The Ifá verse called Oyeku Meji says:

Obinrin leke  
 Obinrin loḍale  
 Women are deceitful  
 Women are liars<sup>76</sup>

Abimbola summarises, 'These few examples of women in the Ifá literary corpus clearly demonstrate the ambivalent attitudes of Yorùbá men to women and the powers women possess. There is a love-hate relationship in the attitude of Yorùbá men to women'.<sup>77</sup> Contrary to Oyewumi's understanding of Yorùbá culture, it seems highly doubtful that the gendered elements of the Ifá literary corpus were imposed recently on Yorùbá culture by 'the West'. On the other hand, the motives to pursue such an explanation. I will argue, are foreign to neither Yorùbá culture nor 'the West'.

For example, Oyewumi's argument neatly parallels the claim that Brazil is a 'racial democracy' (opposite in character to the USA and the rest of the Euro-Atlantic world) and that foreigners' analyses of race and racism in Brazil result from the imposition of an imperialist North American logic.<sup>78</sup> Both Oyewumi's argument and Freyre's dramatically remind us of the cross-cultural variation in the interpretation of human phenotypes (a point that may have been surprising to the Brazilian general public in the 1930s but is hardly news to the scholars who studied gender in the 1990s).<sup>79</sup> However, the work of Oyewumi and Freyre also alerts us to a genre of nationalistic allegory that is common in a transnational world, where scholars and other workers in the diaspora articulate some of the most emotionally powerful and politically persuasive images in the national imaginaries of the homeland. The Brazilian Freyre too formulated his influential socio-moral allegory during and following his sojourn in the United States. Both arguments rely on the construction of an idyllic past time in the homeland that is beyond immediate scrutiny. They equally invoke a sense of national honour – or 'cultural intimacy' – around the conspiracy to conceal contrary facts that every insider knows.

No careful and knowledgeable student of Brazil could, in my opinion, claim that racism works the same in Brazil as it does in the United States, but 'race' and 'racism' are useful categories by which to compare and contrast, analyse and re-think the ways in which discrimination based upon presumed or visible ancestry works in each of the two countries. Likewise, Oyewumi's redefinition of 'gender' does little to clarify or improve upon existing discussions under that rubric, many of which subtly analyse much the same empirical turf that Oyewumi considers: the diversity of female roles and powers in Yorùbá society, the ways in which they overlap with

men's powers, the way these differ from the arrangements of roles and powers in other societies, and the ways in which male-female difference and interrelatedness are projected metaphorically onto other social and symbolic relationships. Oyewumi's redefinition of gender does little more than flatten both 'the Yorùbá conception' and 'the West' into opposite stereotypes.

### **A (culturally) intimate gathering of priests and scholars**

Since Gilberto Freyre organised the First Afro-Brazilian Congress in 1934, dozens of such conferences have brought together priests and scholars intent on re-thinking and reorganising *orixá* religion, and reflecting on its significance for the imagined communities of the region, the nation and the African Diaspora as well. Several such conferences have had momentous effects, largely because they have helped to establish which priests' practices are normal, which are best silenced, and who legitimately speaks for the group.<sup>80</sup> For example, the 1937 Congress organised by Édison Carneiro in Bahia culminated in the organisation of the Union of Afro-Brazilian Sects, the first organisation to regulate priestly conduct and to unite the Bahian temples and their supporters against police repression. In 1983, Wande Abimbola and Marta Moreno Vega organised at the University of Ife, Nigeria, the first World Conference of Orisha Tradition and Culture. Thus, for the first time in history, a conference brought together scholars and priests of *orixá* religion from Brazil, Cuba, Puerto Rico, Trinidad, the United States and Nigeria. A dozen such conferences have followed, albeit under an increasingly factionalised leadership. As the leader of one series of conferences, Abimbola is now regarded by some priests as the paramount leader of the global *orixá*-worshipping community. Such an understanding of Abimbola's role is clearly contested. However, until now, no one else has to my knowledge ever even been credited with such authority. This is cultural history in the making.

It is against this backdrop that events at the 1999 conference at Florida International University acquire their historical significance. Titled 'Òrìṣà Devotion as a World Religion: the Globalization of Yorùbá Religious Culture', this conference brought together dozens of US-based Nigerian, Cuban, Puerto Rican, native US American and Brazilian scholars with priests of equally diverse geographical and national origins. On and off the dais, priests and scholars debated over whether whites and Westernised-looking Yorùbás could legitimately speak for Yorùbá tradition, whether Yorùbá was the only language in which Yorùbá religious concepts could be discussed, whether 'each group [i.e., Cuban and Cuban-inspired *santeros*, Brazilian *Candomblécistas*, Nigerian Yorùbá people, Trinidadian Shango practitioners, etc.] should speak for itself',<sup>81</sup> and whether certain scholarly

disagreements should be settled publicly or privately. University conferences are not simply forums where truth is worked out through debate; they are also stages where *social* priorities are debated and dramatised. Officially authorised speakers have diverse priorities, and so do audiences.

Oyewumi's *ex tempore* presentation at this conference urged caution in translating Yorùbá concepts into English terms. She gave examples of bad translations, such as glossing *oba* as 'king' (when, in truth, it means 'monarch') and insisted that the term *iyawo* ('bride') was ungendered since it describes not only married women but also junior *òrìṣà* possession priests of either sex. Based upon this evidence, she reaffirmed her conclusion that Yorùbá language, and therefore Yorùbá culture, is devoid of gender.

The talk's logical and empirical inadequacies notwithstanding, two Trinidadian priestesses and an African-American priestess in attendance stood up to applaud it. Oyewumi's nostalgic reconstruction of an ideal Yorùbá past and essence held great appeal for New-World priestesses who would resist the patent sexism of American societies (including the forms of gender inequality strongly evident in New-World traditions of *òrìṣà*-worship), for diasporic Yorùbá people anxious to subvert North Americans' tendency to regard Africa and its cultures as inferior, and particularly, according to Mòlara Ogundipe, for Yorùbá men happy to be exonerated of sexism.<sup>82</sup> The African-American priestess who applauded told me years later that she liked Oyewumi's presentation because of Oyewumi's assertiveness, because the scholar delivered it *ex tempore*, and because she seemed to know what she was talking about. The priestess said, however, that she harboured some doubts on account of the fact that Oyewumi wore trousers and cut her hair short – conduct that the priestess did not regard as traditional. What is most striking is that she remembered little of Oyewumi's argument.

In an apparent effort to support Oyewumi's argument, several senior male Yorùbá scholars in the audience offered further examples of Yorùbá gender configurations that might surprise most Americans, such as the Yorùbá practice, in certain contexts, of calling one's patrilineal relatives of either sex *bàbá* (normally meaning 'father' or 'senior man') and matrilineal relatives of either sex *iyá* (normally meaning 'mother' or 'senior woman'). Whether they agreed with Oyewumi's overall proposition that there is no gender in Yorùbá culture is unclear. It seems to me that people who address their mother's and their father's relatives by opposite terms, and regard the two families' normative roles in their lives are indeed employing a gendered distinction that Anglo-Americans simply do not typically make. An unobtrusive analysis could thus conclude that Yorùbá culture is even more gender-bound than US culture, rather than differently gender bound.



Others among the senior Yorùbá scholars in attendance restricted their comments to private conversations. For example, one male Yorùbá philosophy professor at first agreed enthusiastically with Oyewumi but stopped short when I asked him to consider the implications of viri-patrilocal post-marital residence, whereby a Yorùbá woman is normally expected to spend most of her life in a household where she automatically becomes the junior to everyone else in the house. There, she will always owe deference and a measure of servility to those male and female in-laws born before her marriage into the house and to the earlier-married wives, and her rights to land and chieftaincy titles will, in most regions of Yorùbáland, always be secondary to those of anyone born in the house.

Another Yorùbá male scholar told me that Oyewumi's argument was not significant enough to challenge, though this same scholar apparently advocated for the book to receive the prestigious Herskovits Prize of the African Studies Association. Others told me that criticising a junior scholar in public would be considered distasteful in Yorùbá culture. Many of these scholars have already contributed significantly to the academic study of gender in Yorùbá culture and have chosen other venues to express their opinions. Hence, my observations are intended not to impugn the quality of these scholars' work but to illustrate the social dynamics by which community is dramatised at university conferences and certain images of community come to be projected as scholarly truths.

Nor are large North American professional organisations exempt from such dynamics. For example, without consulting any Africanists, much less Yorùbáists, the Sex and Gender Section of the American Sociological Association awarded Oyewumi's *Invention of Women* its 1998 Distinguished Book Award.<sup>83</sup> Thus, a new form of nostalgia and silencing has united the Sex and Gender Section of the ASA in common cause with both Yorùbá long-distance nationalism and with New-World priestesses who are not only aware of the gender bias that has long been a part of their New-World orisha traditions but are ready to do something about it. This nostalgia is new in some details but is logically similar to the reasoning that united Brazilian Regionalism and nationalism with Landes's brand of transnational feminism. It is not clear how fast, how commonly or how deeply this new alliance of ideological forces will affect the practice of *òrìṣà*-worship, but every subsequent conference of scholars and priests is likely to add authority to these motivated representations of (and silence about) the shared past. These motivated representations, in turn, acquire the credibility to structure new communities and hierarchies in the present, just as the historical revisions of Landes and Carneiro did in Brazil after the 1930s.

It is by now old news that the priests and followers of the Yorùbá-Atlantic traditions frequently own and read books about those traditions

written by university-trained scholars – such as Juana Elbein dos Santos' *Os Nãgô e a Morte* (1976) and Pierre Verger's *Orixás* (1981) in Brazil, Lydia Cabrera's *El Monte* (1954) among Cuban-inspired adherents of Ocha, and Robert Farris Thompson's *Flash of the Spirit* (1983) among North American Orisha devotees.<sup>84</sup> The degree to which these books become catechisms or procedural guides is variable, but it is clear that many priests use the information that scholars bring, particularly when those scholars possess a credible claim to information from the African 'motherland'.<sup>85</sup> Thus, the opinions of even West African and West Africanist scholars with no priestly credentials can be enormously influential in the transformative projects of New-World priests and priestesses. Our analyses are often employed as models of African 'tradition', which can be used to include and elevate particular segments of New-World religious communities. Therefore, our analyses can also be used to marginalise other segments of those communities and to de-legitimise existing practices. Our influence can be powerful, whether we are committed to studying our field sites honestly, or we are committed to misrepresenting them as allegories of some ideal that we are recommending to an audience unable to check our facts. Thus, African, Africanist and Afro-Latin Americanist scholars can be influential not only in priestly projects but also in the political projects of First-World scholarly communities with little knowledge of Africa and little intrinsic interest in Africa's complex truths.

### Conclusion

In sum, neither the Candomblé 'cult matriarchate' of Landes nor the 'genderless' Yorùbá society of Oyewumi is a neutral, or completely truthful, report of cultural history. They are inventions in the service of overlapping imagined communities. Yet they also do a disservice both to Yorùbá cultural history and to the thousands of male priests who have built institutions, housed the poor, and healed the sick in the Brazilian Candomblé. Nonetheless, one cannot avoid the fact that these inventions move people and change history. The debates and transformations that I have detailed here reveal not only the pitfalls of tendentious scholarship but also the fact that long-distance, transnational dialogues have continually re-shaped even 'traditional' cultures and religions like Candomblé.

And there is a further point. Transnational social movements and diasporas, like nation states, propagate secrets and defend the intimate zones that are created around those secrets. The facts that the leaders of imagined communities choose to make secret can be surprising – such as the facts of gender and racial inequality in Brazil and gender inequality in Yorùbáland, not to mention the open secret of intergenerational class inequality in the United States; it is difficult to fathom how an outsider

could *fail* to see them. However, any fact that a community can be persuaded to discuss privately and to silence in the company of outsiders can serve the same community-defining function – a function that Herzfeld calls ‘cultural intimacy’.<sup>86</sup> Indeed, old imagined communities can be reinforced and new communities imagined into being by the forceful assertion that some fact of its life needs to be hidden from a larger encompassing group or forbidden for outsiders to speak of.

### Notes

1. Karin Barber, ‘How Man Makes God in West Africa: Yorùbá Attitudes toward the Oriṣa’, *Africa* 51 (1981), p. 739–40; also p. 744 footnote 31.
2. Consider also Scott’s concept of the ‘hidden transcript’, matters that members of the same status group will verbalise among themselves but not with their social superiors or inferiors. See James C. Scott, *Weapons of the Weak: Everyday Forms of Peasant Resistance* (Yale University Press, 1990).
3. Michael Herzfeld, *Cultural Intimacy: The Social Poetics of the Nation-State* (New York and London: Routledge, 1997), pp. 1–36.
4. J. Lorand Matory, *Black Atlantic Religion: Tradition, Transnationalism, and Matriarchy in the Afro-Brazilian Candomblé* (Princeton NJ: Princeton University Press, forthcoming); J. Lorand Matory, ‘The English Professors of Brazil: On the Diasporic Roots of the Yorùbá Nation’, *Comparative Studies in Society and History* 41 (1999), pp. 72–103; J. Lorand Matory, ‘Jeje: Repensando Nações e Transnacionalismo’, *Mana* 5 (1999), pp. 57–80.
5. See Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities*, revised edition (London and New York: Verso, 1991 [first edition London and New York: Verso, 1983]). I broaden Anderson’s concept of ‘imagined communities’ by suggesting that nation states are not the only communities so united by machine-reproduced texts and that the rituals shared by dispersed populations (including those recommended by texts that are distributed fast or over long distances) enable powerful ‘imaginings’ of communally shared experience among unacquainted parties.
6. Ruth Landes, *The City of Women* (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1994 [repr. New York: Macmillan, 1947]), p. 248.
7. Ruth Landes, ‘A Cult Matriarchate and Male Homosexuality’, *Journal of Abnormal and Social Psychology* 35(1940), pp. 386–97.
8. Mark Alan Healey, ‘“The Sweet Matriarchy of Bahia”: Ruth Landes’ Ethnography of Race and Gender’, *Disposition* 23 (1998 [2000]), pp. 87–116.
9. Landes, *The City*, p. 202.
10. Derek Freeman, *Margaret Mead and Samoa: the Making and Unmaking of an Anthropological Myth* (Cambridge MA: Harvard University Press, 1983); Margaret Mead, *Coming of Age in Samoa* (Boston: Beacon, 1928).
11. Landes, ‘A Cult Matriarchate’, pp. 386–97, 391.
12. Landes, ‘A Cult Matriarchate’, pp. 391–92.
13. Édison Carneiro, *Os Candomblés da Bahia*, 7th edn (Rio de Janeiro: Civilização Brasileira, 1986 [repr. Salvador da Bahia: Museu do Estado da Bahia, 1948]), p. 54.
14. Compare Landes, ‘A Cult Matriarchate’, p. 393; and Carneiro, *Os Candomblés*, p. 52.
15. Rachel E. Harding, *A Refuge in Thunder: Candomblé and Alternative Spaces of Blackness* (Bloomington and Indianapolis: University of Indiana Press, 2000), pp. 71–4; Carneiro, *Os Candomblés*, pp. 57, 104–9; Kim D. Butler, *Freedoms Given, Freedoms Won: Afro-Brazilians in Post-Abolition São Paulo and Salvador* (New Brunswick NJ and London: Rutgers University Press, 1998), pp. 193, 195; Fayette Wimberly, ‘The Expansion of Afro-Bahian Religious Practices in Nineteenth-Century Cachoeira’, *Afro-Brazilian Culture and Politics: Bahia, 1790s to 1990s*, ed. Hendrik Kraay (Armonk NY: M.E. Sharpe, 1998), pp. 82–5.

16. Butler, *Freedoms Given*, pp. 193–209; private conversation, 3 December 2002.
17. Mariza Corrêa, 'O Mistério dos Orixás e das Bonecas: Raça e Gênero na Antropologia Brasileira', *Etnográfica*, 4 (2000), p. 245; Carneiro, *Os Candomblés*, p. 104.
18. Landes, *The City*; Landes, 'A Cult Matriarchate', pp. 386–97.
19. On the term 'struggle for the possession of the sign', see Dick Hebdige, *Subculture: the Meaning of Style* (London and New York: Methuen, 1979).
20. George Mosse, *Nationalism and Sexuality* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1985).
21. See Corrêa, 'O Mistério', pp. 246–8, esp. 246 footnotes 24 and 25; Healey, 'The Sweet Matriarchy', p. 88; Roger Bastide, *O Candomblé da Bahia* (São Paulo: Editora Nacional, 1961), p. 309; René Ribeiro, 'Personality and the Psychosexual Adjustment of Afro-Brazilian Cult Members', *Journal de la Société des Américanistes* 58 (1969), p. 122.
22. Landes, *The City*, p. 37; Landes, 'A Cult Matriarchate', p. 393.
23. Corrêa, 'O Mistério', pp. 241–51, esp. 251; Healey, 'The Sweet Matriarchy', pp. 97–8.
24. Édison Carneiro, *Religiões Negras e Negros Bantos* (Civilização Brasileira, 1991 [repr. *Religiões Negras*, Rio: Civilização Brasileira, 1936, and *Negros Bantos*, Rio: Civilização Brasileira, 1937]), pp. 58, 60, 91.
25. Édison Carneiro, 'The Structure of African Cults in Bahia', *Journal of American Folk-Lore*, 53 (1940), p. 272.
26. Carneiro, 'The Structure of African', p. 273.
27. Landes, *The City*, p. 37; Landes, 'A Cult Matriarchate', p. 393.
28. Carneiro, *Os Candomblés*, pp. 103–9.
29. Carneiro, *Os Candomblés*, p. 57; also Butler, *Freedoms Given*, p. 195.
30. Carneiro, *Os Candomblés*, pp. 106, 119–23.
31. Jocélio Teles dos Santos, *O Dono da Terra: o Caboclo nos Candomblés da Bahia* (Salvador, Brazil: SarahLetras, 1995), p. 19.
32. J. Lorand Matory, 'Homens Montados: Homossexualidade e Simbolismo da Possessão nas Religiões Afro-Brasileiras', *Escravidão e Invenção da Liberdade*, ed. João José Reis (São Paulo: Brasiliense, 1988), pp. 215–31.
33. Peter Fry, 'Male Homosexuality and Spirit Possession in Brazil', *Journal of Homosexuality* 11 (1986), pp. 137–53.
34. Richard C. Trexler, *Sex and Conquest: Gendered Violence, Political Order, and the European Conquest of the Americas* (Ithaca NY: Cornell University Press, 1995).
35. The contrast between penetrators and penetrated is not the only idiom of sexual classification available in Brazil, but this particular idiom of sexuality and power remains central to most working-class Brazilians' vocabulary of social classification, and to Brazilian men's and boys' daily negotiation of respect. See Peter A. Jackson, 'Reading Rio from Bangkok: An Asianist Perspective on Brazil's Male Homosexual Cultures' (review article), *American Ethnologist* 27 (2000), pp. 950–60; Don Kulick, *Travesti: Sex, Gender and Culture among Brazilian Transgendered Prostitutes* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1998); Richard G. Parker, *Beneath the Equator: Cultures of Desire, Male Homosexuality, and Emerging Gay Communities in Brazil* (New York: Routledge, 1998); Richard G. Parker, *Bodies, Pleasures, and Passions: Sexual Culture in Contemporary Brazil* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1991); James N. Green, *Beyond Carnival: Male Homosexuality in Twentieth-Century Brazil* (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 1999).
36. For example see Kulick, *Travesti*.
37. The reader should not misinterpret 'transvestism', which means 'cross-dressing', as a euphemism for or type of 'homosexuality.'
38. Many Cuban and Puerto Rican adherents of similar traditions think so too. See Lydia Cabrera, *El Monte*, 5th edn (Miami: Colección del Chicherequí, 1983 [repr. Havana: Ediciones CR, 1954]), p. 56; Rómulo Lachatañeré, *El Sistema Religioso de los Afrocaribanos* (Editorial de Ciencias Sociales, 1992), pp. 223–4.
39. Fry, 'Male Homosexuality' p. 138. Note that Fry does not pathologise the *adé*, as do Landes, Carneiro and their successors, such as Bastide (*O Candomblé*, p. 309) and Ribeiro ('Personality', pp. 109–20).

40. Délcio Monteiro de Lima, *Os Homoeróticos* (Rio de Janeiro: F. Alves, 1983), pp. 167ff.
41. Patrícia Birman, 'Identidade social e homossexualismo no Candomblé', *Religião e Sociedade* 12 (1985), pp. 2–21; also Maria Lina Leão Teixeira, 'Lorogun – Identidades sexuais e poder no candomblé', *Candomblé: Desvendando Identidades*, ed. Carlos Eugênio Marcondes de Moura (São Paulo: EMW Editores, 1987), p. 48; and Landes, 'A Cult Matriarchate', p. 395.
42. Fry, 'Male Homosexuality', pp. 147–9.
43. For the argument that men of any given social race earn more on average than the women of that social race see George Reid Andrews, 'Racial Inequality in Brazil and the United States: A Statistical Comparison', *Journal of Social History*, 26 (1992), p. 252. In the contexts where light-skinned gay men successfully conceal their sexuality, they possess considerable economic and political advantages over women as a group and blacks as a group, see *Veja Magazine*, 12 May 1993, pp. 52–9. For an explanation of the term 'social race', see Charles Wagley, Introduction, *Race and Class in Rural Brazil*, ed. Charles Wagley (New York: UNESCO/International Documents Service, Columbia University Press, 1963), p. 14; Carl N. Degler, *Neither Black Nor White: Slavery and Race Relations in Brazil and the United States* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1971), p. 105.
44. Teixeira, 'Lorogun', pp. 44–5; also Maria Stella de Azevedo Santos, *Meu Tempo É Agora* (São Paulo: Editora Oduduwa, 1993), pp. 52–4 on the servile status of women consecrated to female *orixás*.
45. For example, James H. Sweet, 'Male Homosexuality and Spiritism in the African Diaspora: The Legacies of a Link', *Journal of the History of Sexuality* 7 (1996), pp. 84–202.
46. J. Lorand Matory, *Sex and the Empire That Is No More: Gender and the Politics of Metaphor in Oyó Yorùbá Religion* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota, 1994); J. Lorand Matory, *Sex and the Empire That Is No More: A Ritual History of Women's Power among the Oyó-Yorùbá*, Ph.D. dissertation, Department of Anthropology, University of Chicago, 1991; Matory, 'Homens Montados'.
47. Melville Herskovits, *The Myth of the Negro Past* (Boston: Beacon, 1958) p. 214; Melville Herskovits, *The New World Negro*, ed. Frances S. Herskovits (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1969), pp. 13–16, 35–8, 57–8, 79.
48. See Matory, *Gender and the Politics of Metaphor*; Matory, *A Ritual History*; Matory, 'Homens Montados'.
49. Matory, *A Ritual History*; Matory, *Gender and the Politics of Metaphor*.
50. In a contrast case equally revealing of the sexual implications of the verb, the term *mágun* (lit. 'don't mount') refers to a 'medicine', or magical application, that kills the paramour of a married woman at the moment that he attempts to penetrate her.
51. Matory, *Gender and the Politics of Metaphor*, p. 171. This priestly cross-dressing has been documented at least since 1910, and there is no reason to believe that it was new at that time.
52. Herskovits, *Myth*, pp. 211–16.
53. Matory, *Gender and the Politics of Metaphor*, p. 208; Matory, *A Ritual History*, pp. 22, 520–1, 538; pace Oyeronke Oyewumi, *The Invention of Women: Making an African Sense of Western Gender Discourses* (Minneapolis and London: University of Minnesota Press, 1997), p. 117.
54. Stephen O. Murray, 'Overview [West Africa]', in *Boy-Wives and Female Husbands*, eds. Stephen O. Murray and Will Roscoe (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1998), p. 100; personal communication, 1996). Oyewumi, *The Invention of Women*, p. 117.
55. While African nationalists are often wont to dismiss homosexuality as a 'white man's disease', there is evidence of its practice in contemporary and pre-colonial Africa. There is nothing 'un-African' about homosexuality. See J. Lorand Matory, *Sex and the Empire That Is No More: Gender and the Politics of Metaphor Oyó Yorùbá Religion* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota, 1994), p. 2 for additional citations on same-sex sexual practices in the recent and distant past of sub-Saharan Africa. See also James H. Sweet, 'Male Homosexuality and Spiritism in the African Diaspora: The Legacies of a Link', *Journal of the History of Sexuality* 7 (1996).

56. For example, Rowland Abiodun, 'Women in Yorùbá Religious Images,' *African Languages and Cultures* 2 (1989), pp. 1–18; Bòlanlẹ̀ Awẹ̀, 'The Iyalode in the Traditional Yorùbá Political System', *Sexual Stratification*, ed. Alice Schlegel (New York: Columbia University Press, 1997); Bòlanlẹ̀ Awẹ̀, 'The Economic Role of Women in Traditional African Society: the Yorùbá Example', *La Civilisation de la Femme dans la Tradition Africaine*, Proceedings of a Colloquium in Abidjan, Ivory Coast, 3–8 July 1972; N. A. Fadipe, *The Sociology of the Yorùbá* (Ibàdàn: Ibàdàn University Press, 1970); O. O. Okediji and F. O. Okediji, 'Marital Stability and Social Structure in an African City', *The Nigerian Journal of Economic and Social Studies* 8 (1966); Mọlara Ogundipe-Leslie, 'Women in Nigeria', *Women in Nigeria Today*, ed. S. Bappa, J. Ibrahim, A. M. Imam, F. J. A. Kamara, H. Mahdi, M. A. Modibbo, A. S. Mohammed, H. Mohammed, A. R. Mustapha, N. Perchonock, and R. I. Pittin (London: Zed Books, 1985); Jacob K. Olupona, 'Women's Rituals, Kingship and Power among the Ondo-Yorùbá of Nigeria', *Queens, Queen Mothers, Priestesses, and Power*, ed. Flora E. S. Kaplan (New York: New York Academy of Sciences, 1997); Wande Abimbọla, 'Images of Women in the Ifa Literary Corpus', *Queens, Queen Mothers, Priestesses, and Power*, ed. Flora E. S. Kaplan (New York: New York Academy of Sciences, 1997).
57. Oyewumi, *The Invention of Women*, p. 117.
58. Oyewumi, *The Invention of Women*, p. 158.
59. Oyewumi, *The Invention of Women*, p. 31.
60. Oyewumi, *The Invention of Women*, p. 157.
61. Oyewumi, *The Invention of Women*, p. 78.
62. Oyewumi, *The Invention of Women*, p. 12.
63. Oyewumi, *The Invention of Women*, p. 78.
64. Oyewumi, *The Invention of Women*, pp. 13, 29, 42, 47, 61, 160, 163, 166, 169.
65. Oyewumi, *The Invention of Women*, for example, pp. x, xi, xiv, xv, 162–3. Among the numerous ironies of this argument is that there was no Yorùbá language or ethnic identity per se before Western-educated, Christian Òyó people constructed that hybrid language in the mid-19th century as a means of proselytizing the Òyó, the Èkitì, the Ègbà, the Òndó and other linguistically related peoples who had been scattered by the slave trade and resettled in Freetown, Sierra Leone. Oyewumi's 'Yorùbá conception' is more certainly a product of Western colonisation than most of the gendered phenomena that she describes. See Matory, 'The English Professors of Brazil'.
66. Oyewumi, *The Invention of Women*, p. 16.
67. Oyewumi, *The Invention of Women*, pp. ix–xxi, 1–17; see also Ifi Amadiume, *Male Daughters, Female Husbands: Gender and Sex in an African Society* (London: Zed Books, 1987) and Matory, *Gender and the Politics of Metaphor*; Matory, *A Ritual History* for non-dichotomous treatments of gender relations in southern Nigerian cultures.
68. See Oyewumi, *The Invention of Women*, p. 108.
69. Oyewumi, *The Invention of Women*, pp. 41, 49, 75, 77.
70. Oyewumi, *The Invention of Women*, p. 75.
71. Oyewumi, *The Invention of Women*, pp. 61–2.
72. Oyewumi, *The Invention of Women*, pp. 45, 53, 62.
73. Matory, *Gender and the Politics of Metaphor*, pp. 28–44.
74. Oyewumi, *The Invention of Women*, p. 33. Consider also the Yorùbá proverb *Pèlẹ̀ lábo; pèlẹ̀ lákọ* ('Even in expressing sympathy, there's a nice [lit. 'female'] way and a mean, ornery [lit. 'male'] way'). In both verbal expressions, the contrast between male and female has a moral valence easily recognised by most Yorùbá people.
75. Wande Abimbọla, 'Images of Women in the Ifa Literary Corpus', *Queens, Queen Mothers, Priestesses, and Power*, ed. Flora E. S. Kaplan (New York: New York Academy of Sciences, 1997), p. 403.
76. Abimbọla, 'Images of Women', pp. 408–9.
77. Abimbọla, 'Images of Women', p. 411.
78. See Gilberto Freyre, *The Masters and the Slaves*, translated by Samuel Putnam, 2nd English-language edition, (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1986), [originally published as

- Casa-Grande e Senzala*]; J. Michael Turner, 'Brown into Black', *Race, Class and Power in Brazil*, ed. Pierre-Michel Fontaine (Los Angeles: Center for Afro-American Studies, UCLA, 1985), pp. 78–9; Thomas E. Skidmore, 'Race and Class in Brazil: Historical Perspectives', in *Race, Class and Power in Brazil*, ed. Pierre-Michel Fontaine (Los Angeles: Center for Afro-American Studies, UCLA, 1985); Thales de Azevedo, *Democracia racial* (Pétropolis, Rio de Janeiro: Vozes, 1975).
79. For an excellent overview of the anthropological literature on gender in sub-Saharan Africa (and one greatly at odds with Oyewumi's presentation of 'Western' views of gender in Africa and elsewhere), see Betty Potash, 'Gender Relations in Sub-Saharan Africa', *Gender and Anthropology*, ed. Sandra Morgen (Washington DC: American Anthropological Association, 1989) and Flora E. S. Kaplan (ed.) *Queens, Queen Mothers, Priestesses, and Power: Case Studies in African Gender* (New York: New York Academy of Sciences, 1997). Cross-cultural variation in the construction of gender roles has been a central theme in anthropology since the 1920s, for example, Margaret Mead, *Sex and Temperament in Three Primitive Societies* (New York: Morrow Quill, 1963); Mead, *Coming of Age*.
  80. On the importance of similar conferences, linking scholars and nationalist laypeople, in the overseas propagation of Greek nationalism see Loring M. Danforth, *The Macedonian Conflict: Ethnic Nationalism in a Transnational World* (Princeton NJ: Princeton University Press, 1995), pp. 90, 92, 95.
  81. The author of the position that each group should speak for itself did not appear to be advocating the truth of Oyewumi's argument but was instead defending the autonomy of each national tradition within the Yorùbá-Atlantic world. This person was, from the beginning, an important leader of the movement to re-unite the international community of *oriṣa*-worshippers but came to resist the emergent principle of West African Yorùbá supremacy and the apparent male supremacy that she encountered among West African collaborators in the project.
  82. Molará Ogundipe-Leslie at 'Roundtable: The Invention of Woman: Theorizing African Women and Gender Now and into the Future', African Studies Association, Washington, D.C., 6 December 2002.
  83. Anonymous selection committee member, private conversation, 19 November 2001.
  84. Juana Elbein dos Santos, *Os Nãgô e a Morte* (Pétropolis, Brazil: Vozes, 1976); Pierre Verger, *Orixás* (São Paulo: Corrupio, 1981); Lydia Cabrera, *El Monte*, 5th ed. (Colección del Chicherekú, 1983); Robert Farris Thompson, *Flash of the Spirit* (New York: Random House, 1983).
  85. For example, see Mikelle Smith Omari, 'From the Inside to the Outside: the Art and Ritual of Bahian Candomblé', Monograph Series #24 (Los Angeles: Museum of Cultural History, U.C.L.A., 1984), p. 54 footnotes 50, 55 and 64.
  86. Michael Herzfeld, *Cultural Intimacy: The Social Poetics of the Nation-State* (New York and London: Routledge, 1997).