

from Stage / on Display, Andrew Shryock (ed.)

CHAPTER 6

Sexual Secrets

CANDOMBLÉ, BRAZIL, AND THE MULTIPLE
INTIMACIES OF THE AFRICAN DIASPORA

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THROUGHOUT THE late nineteenth and twentieth centuries, scholars and thinkers confronting the challenge of how the Others of the Atlantic nation-state should be included have looked to Candomblé for answers. Since Brazilian Raymundo Nina Rodrigues's studies of this religion (1905/1988, 1905/1945, 1896/1900/1935) inaugurated Afro-Brazilian studies as we know it today, Candomblé has been celebrated not only as a uniquely pure manifestation of African culture in the white-dominated Americas but also as an exemplary case of women's power in a male-dominated world. Amid this adulation stands the apparent irony that some very famous priests have been men and, for many international opinion makers, the scandal that many of them appear to have been "passive homosexuals."

As George Mosse (1985) has pointed out, conformity to certain norms of sexual conduct has long been a key symbol of membership in the European nation-state and acceptance of its broader social expectations.¹ Moreover, homosexuals, Jews, and Gypsies have figured as overlapping and analogous counterimages of such membership and conformity. Sexuality is a particularly rich area in which to discuss the dynamics of imagined communities, for several reasons. First, it is a site of fantasy, daily performance, and dissimulation. While people might appear to be conforming to the norms of one imagined community, their visible actions, as well as their private symbols and narratives, might simultaneously embody alternative imaginations of self and community. Second, people's judgments about whom they can divulge these alternatives to are themselves indicative of the forms of hierarchy and community that shape the shared social world. Matters that one

Stanford University Press
Stanford, California

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Printed in the United States of America on acid-free, archival-quality paper.

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data

Off stage/on display : intimacy and ethnography in the age of public culture / edited by Andrew Shryock.

p. cm.

Includes bibliographical references and index.

ISBN 0-8047-5006-8 (cloth : alk. paper)—ISBN 0-8047-5007-6 (pbk. : alk. paper)

1. Ethnology—Congresses.
 2. Intimacy (Psychology)—Congresses.
 3. Privacy—Congresses.
 4. Mass media and culture—Congresses.
 5. Group identity—Congresses.
 6. Popular culture—Congresses.
1. Shryock, Andrew. CN320.O35 2004

306.4—dc22

2004006387

Original Printing 2004

Last figure below indicates year of this printing:

13 12 11 10 09 08 07 06 05 04

Typeset by G&S Typesetters, Inc., in 10.5/12 Bembo

discusses only among insiders and not with members of higher or lower social strata are described by James C. Scott as "hidden transcripts" (1990).

For example, adherents and advocates of Brazilian Candomblé gossip among themselves about each other's sex lives, but one of my priest friends in Candomblé has denied the relevance of the matter and urged that it not be discussed in print.² Nigerian Yorùbá people typically do not talk about sex with people much older or younger than themselves, and, of course, age is a major idiom of hierarchy in Yorùbáland.³ One worthy hypothesis is that West African Yorùbá people's relative silence about sex reveals not its unimportance but its centrality to the social order.⁴ The prominence of male homosexuals in Candomblé might generate similar hypotheses. Since the 1930s, it has been an object of international controversy in which much more than the priests' sexual conduct is at stake. The respectability of the nation and the status of women internationally are also in question. As a Brazilian colleague pointed out to me, there might be no more homosexual men in the Candomblé priesthood than in the Roman Catholic priesthood, the psychiatric profession, or even the general population. I have no way of verifying such claims in a statistically reliable way. Yet numerous nonhomosexual priests have told me that they or their families struggled against their calling for fear that, once it became common knowledge that they had been possessed by Candomblé gods, other people would assume they were homosexual.

In the absence of proof to the contrary, Bahians tend to assume that a male possession priest is a *bichia* or *adé* (that is, a man who is sexually penetrated). In fact, many probably are, and many are not. In the allied tradition of Cuban Santería, or Ocha, most male possession priests I know might be described as homosexual. They and my priestess friends discuss the matter freely. Moreover, the oft-repeated official prohibition on the entry of women, homosexuals, and people possessed often by their gods into the Cuban Ifá divination priesthood entails an implicit recognition that all of these groups are strongly present—symbolically and demographically—in the broader Cuban-inspired Ocha tradition. I have not observed anything describable as homosexuality in the West African Yorùbá possession priesthood, though later in this essay I will detail one striking account thereof reported to me by a highly reliable Yorùbá scholar.

I am the first to publish the argument that indigenously Cuban and Brazilian suppositions about the homosexuality of priests are logically and historically related to the transvestism of their West African counterparts, but I am not the first to discuss these geographically separate traditions individually. Nor am I the first author to face stiff opposition to even the most oblique mention of homosexuality in relation to Candomblé. I feel compelled to speak of this matter both despite and because of the controversy. On the one hand, the homophobia of nationalists neither needs nor deserves

my silent complicity. On the other, the process by which nationalists and other powerful opinion makers have imposed an official stigma on what appears to be part of a circum-Atlantic cultural tradition deserves explanation in itself. To keep silence on this set of rumors and symbolic continuities is to accept as natural a politically informed choice to regard these continuities as embarrassing. Indeed, there are Cuban and Brazilian priests who find personal affirmation in my analysis, a fact equally worthy of explanation and unworthy of ignoring.

Of course, ritual secrecy undoubtedly defines the boundaries of *oriṣà*-worshipping priesthoods, but, like families and other bounded groups, the sacred communities of the black Atlantic keep secrets whose significance to the group is debated. Which leads me to the third reason why sex is a rich site in which to discuss the dynamics of imagined communities. Sex is a classic object of what Herzfeld calls "cultural intimacy"—that is, a sensibility that encourages state elites 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 very reason for many people's loyalty to the nation-state (Herzfeld 1997: 1–36). Implicit in this model is Herzfeld's concept of "disemia," a term he uses to describe the tension between the state's official (and respectable) representation of the nation and the people's candid recognition of the nation's collective "flaws." According to Herzfeld, this candid recognition enables ordinary people to advance alternative versions of the nation's historical foundations, to legitimize alternative claims on or against the state, and to feel the affection for the nation that is crucial to the nation-state's survival.

What I would add to this picture is an emphasis on the *multiplicities* of the communities that can be constructed around similar collective "flaws." Among these communities are religions, sects, regions, nations, transnational communities and movements, and supranational civilizations, such as "Europe," "Latin America," and "the African diaspora." That is, the nation-state is subdivided, cross cut, and encompassed by other imagined communities that are structured by numerous disemias of their own. Moreover, I will argue that the nation-state does not imagine itself, or its "flaws," independently of the subnational, supranational, and transnational communities that coexist with it. Overlapping imagined communities are often constituted by diverse interpretations of overlapping secrets, or "flaws," and elaborate defenses against their telling. Often, the flaws of one imagined community are the virtues of another, and intercommunity debates over whether a specific phenomenon is a flaw or a virtue are regularly a source of ideological and organizational change.

The Brazilian white elite, for instance, long felt embarrassed under the gaze of North America and northwestern Europe, particularly since French-

man Arthur de Gobineau and other racists diagnosed Brazil's generally dark racial makeup as a permanent obstacle to its national progress. By segregating its diplomatic corps and navy, the Brazilian state consequently endeavored to hide the nation's true complexion from the world. Yet prosperous, literate, and Anglophone Afro-Brazilians who traveled back and forth to West Africa from the late nineteenth to the mid-twentieth century brought to Northeastern Brazil the idea that the Yorùbá were superior to other Africans. Because Northeastern white and mulatto elites could reason that this fact made their region (which had received a disproportionate number of proto-Yorùbá and proto-Jeje captives)⁵ superior to the economically dominant Southeast (which had received a disproportionate number of non-Yorùbá Central Africans), Northeastern scholars like Edison Carneiro took up the cause of a Yorùbá-centered discourse of African dignity. Once an affirmation of Northeastern regional worth, Carneiro's Yorùbáphilia has gradually become an important feature of Brazilian cultural nationalism and of its projection abroad. Thus, the disemic tension between the official projection of national secrets and the celebratory popular revelation thereof is embedded in bigger, messier debates, with the result that, in Brazil, the early-twentieth-century state's official concealment of its large black population has given way to a Northeastern-inspired public emphasis on the superiority of certain kinds of African roots.

In this essay, I will illustrate the *diversity* of the imagined communities that have struggled over the meaning of Brazil's national "flaws," showing how a dialogue of overlapping disemias has reshaped Brazilian national consciousness and popular conceptions of Candombélé leadership as well. Specifically, I will document a series of controversies related to sexual secrets, showing how these secrets constitute a wide array of communities that share (and frequently transcend) the geography of Northeastern Brazil.

Cultural Intimacy and the Transnational Feminism of Ruth Landes

This saga of sexuality and secrets begins with Ruth Landes's *City of Women* (1947) and the consequences of its revelation and reinterpretation of Brazilian national secrets. Landes's research was initially embarrassing to Euro-Brazilian nationalists for two reasons. First, in a country ambivalent about its racial and cultural blackness, she studied Candombélé. However, as a Boasian, she studied it not as a racial flaw to be hidden but as proof of the richness of a transnational African legacy and, more important, of the potential for women's equality in her own country, the United States. The final two paragraphs of the book summarize how Landes saw her relationship to the guardians of Brazilian cultural intimacy.

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?" (1947:248).

In her study of Candombélé in Brazil, a country she knew to be highly sexist, Landes avowed she had found evidence of a "cult matriarchy." In the Brazilian state of Bahia, she reported that women ruled the religious affairs, and therefore the most *important* affairs, of the black people. In her search for a primordial alternative to the lamentable condition of her home audience and herself, she had discovered Bahia, of which she declared, "I know by now that women are the chosen sex [in Bahia]. . . . I take it for granted just as I know in our world that men are the chosen sex" (1947:202). Like Margaret Mead, as some would argue, Landes slighted or distorted a great deal of evidence in her analysis (Freeman 1983; Healey 1998/2000:93). For example, to account for the significant number of men leading Candombélé temples during her visit, she claimed they were violating "African tradition" because of their own psychological problems and the ritual laxity of the women, who, according to Landes, had only recently begun to initiate men.

To prove that the statistical majority of male priests in Candombélé was abnormal and a result of recent corruption, Landes violated Brazilian cultural intimacy yet again by reporting the widespread view that male possession priests were *adés*, or, in Landes's medico-pathological parlance, "passive homosexuals." Further, their entry into the priesthood was to be blamed on a new generation of supposedly lackadaisical, untraditional Candombélé priestesses serving the *taboco* Indian spirits (Landes 1940). Through her choice to call them "passive homosexuals" and in her exposition, Landes argued that male possession priests belonged not to a religious tradition but to a disease category. This revelation was far more embarrassing to the light-colored Brazilian bourgeoisie than was her foregrounding of black culture. Landes's account of gender roles in the Candombélé priesthood is historically incorrect, though it has come to be regarded as factual by most subsequent students of this religion. Just as importantly, her revelation of a "homosexual" presence in that priesthood provoked a series of defensive responses by the scholarly representatives of other imagined communities who regarded that presence as a collective "flaw."

These responses are brightly illuminated by Herzfeld's concept of "cultural intimacy." Moreover, they help to account for a series of changes in the popular conception of Candombélé, for an emergent hierarchy in the distribution of government and private patronage among temples, and for the trajectory of at least two scholarly careers—those of Ruth Landes and Yortùbá

sociologist Oyeronkẹ Oyewumi. Landes's discussion of sexual matters particularly discomfited her Brazilian scholarly colleagues, even those who would have been perfectly happy for her to write about the cultural and demographic importance of Afro-Brazilians. These colleagues were clearly more attuned to international standards of national respectability and more concerned about guarding the cultural intimacy of Brazil than were the priests and subjects of the trans-Atlantic sacred nations. A variant on such cultural intimacy seems to motivate Yorùbá nationalists' response to my own published argument about the gender symbolism of the Brazilian, Cuban, and Nigerian *òrìṣà* priesthoods. The twist in this case is that the argument of my major Yorùbá nationalist critic, Oyeronkẹ Oyewumi, rests on the assertion that "authentic" Yorùbá culture is superior due to its alleged lack of the flaws she attributes to the West: homosexuality and gender itself. Homophobia is a common adjunct of nationalism; it is no surprise, then, that it has also become an important topic operation in a range of communities within and beyond the nation-state. Indeed, it is common ground on which North-eastern regionalists, Brazilian nationalists, Yorùbá nationalists, and transnational feminists can struggle over the meaning of the *adé* priest and the importance of keeping him a secret.⁶

Contrary to Landes's assertion, male leadership in Candomblé is an old phenomenon. Throughout the nineteenth century, men outnumbered women in the Bahian Candomblé priesthood. Indeed, the increase in *female* leadership was the more recent phenomenon (Harding 2000: 71–74).⁷ Butler believes that a tradition of exclusively female temple leadership began with the foundation of Casa Branca, or the Ilé Iyá Nassô temple, in the mid-nineteenth century, relatively late in the documented history of Candomblé religious activity in Brazil (Butler 1998: 193–209). Without making claims about the relative numbers of male and female priests, Butler believes that the ideal of female leadership gained prestige due to the concentrated attention to, and protection of, the Casa Branca temple and its offshoots by scholars and other bourgeois elites (Butler, personal communication, 12/3/02). There is evidence, as Butler suggests, that the idea of an exclusively female temple leadership was promoted by influential scholars in the 1930s and 1940s. However, evidence that this idea existed in Candomblé discourse or practice before the mid-twentieth century is unclear.

In the 1930s, male priests still outnumbered female priests (Corrêa 2000: 245; Carneiro 1948/1986: 104). Nonetheless, since the publication of Landes's work (1940, 1947), the scholarly literature has come to speak with one voice on the matter: in the Candomblé priesthood, "women are the chosen sex." Landes herself inaugurated the description of Candomblé as a "cult matriarchate" and a "city of women." She introduced into the Brazilian national debate over the legitimacy of Candomblé the medical-pathologizing logic of "homosexuality," which not only cast male priests as diseased but

also alienated them from any legitimate *cultural* tradition (see also Bastide 1961: 309; Ribeiro 1969: 122). Moreover, the Freudian notion that "homosexuals" are men who identify excessively with the mother figure appeared to bolster Landes's argument that women are the paradigmatic leaders of the religion: men who aspired to become leaders had to imitate them.

As Landes herself reported, however, the apparent "abnormality" of many male priests seems not to have troubled other priests or adherents of Candomblé. As priests, these men were "supported and even adored by those normal men of whom they were before the butt and object of derision" (Landes 1947/1994: 37; 1940: 393). And, in the late 1930s, Landes noted that Edison Carneiro, who served as her principal guide in Bahia, personally admired the beauty and liveliness of male homosexual priests (Landes 1947/1994: 37). However, over the course of their friendship, Landes appears to have changed Carneiro's mind, or at least his public posture toward male priests, in a manner contrary to the convictions of most adherents of Candomblé. His subsequent publications appear to reflect embarrassment over Landes's revelation of Bahia's "intimate" cultural secrets. Despite his private comfort with the *adé* priests, Carneiro's later published work dismisses them, and all male priests, as unrepresentative of Candomblé tradition and describes their numerical predominance as recent. He added to his indictment the vocabulary of the Brazilian state's efforts to regulate the practice of the healing arts, calling the male priests not only "effeminate" but also "charlatans" and "sorcerers" (Carneiro 1948/1986: 104–106). Nostalgia for an undocumented time when Candomblé was its true, all-female self had been a linchpin of Landes's argument and would become a *deus ex machina* in Carneiro's as well.

Male priests (and the priestesses who had allegedly admitted them to the priesthood) became scapegoats for everything powerful outsiders might find to condemn in the religion. Like Landes, Carneiro argued that almost all male priests were uninitiated frauds, commercializers, tyrannical leaders, poor administrators, and practitioners of evil magic. They were said to gossip like women and to be sexually confused. Not even the most gymnastic, speculative arguments were barred in the effort to dismiss male priests and thereby guarantee the international respectability of a tradition supposedly made authentic by their absence. While male chief priests were accused of not believing in the "evil" magic they used to exploit their clientele, female chief priests were credited with an innocent, if naive, belief in the innocuous magic they practiced (Carneiro 1948/1986: 103–109). Carneiro also suggested that male priests belonged mostly to the "least respectable" and least "orthodox" nations of Candomblé—that is, to the Angola, Congo, and caboclo nations (as opposed to the "orthodox" Nagô and Jeje). In truth, the personnel and ritual content of these nations had long overlapped. Yet Carneiro, moved by the desire to spare his region embarrassment and to save his priestess friends from persecution, invented a tradition and constructed around it boundaries

that legitimized the Nagô and Jeje priestesses by vilifying and delegitimizing the male priests.⁸

Edison Carneiro published *Candomblés da Bahia* in 1948, after Landes's two major publications on the subject (1940 and 1947) had already appeared. He was clearly influenced by Landes, but his own work was marked by a more ambiguous style of exposition. On the one hand, he reproduced the opinion that female leadership is the primordial norm of Afro-Bahian religion, thus affirming the respectability of the *real* tradition (that is, the selected subset of past and present Candomblé practice that *he* deemed respectable within the imagined community of his region and nation). On the other hand, his degree of knowledge did not allow him to ignore a vast body of facts that would suggest the contrary. For example, Carneiro credits the nineteenth-century African-born priest Bambuxê (Baṁgboṣê) with initiating Aninha, the future chief priestess of the Opô Afonjá temple. Carneiro also documents the esteemed leadership of the Yorubá/Nagô babaláwo diviners Martiniano do Bonfim and Felisberto Sowzer, and he mentions numerous eminent male leaders of Jeje and Nagô temples who were alive during his time. Nonetheless, for all the contrary evidence that he himself recorded, Carneiro's synoptic statements about the "tradition" seem designed to satisfy the same partisan notions of respectability Landes invoked. Carneiro wrote:

Of the 67 temples registered in the Union, 37 were directed by priests and 30 by priestesses. It seems, however, that there were not always priests and priestesses and that, in the past, Candomblé was, distinctly, the domain of women. . . . Only the Congo temples can be seen as an exception. . . . In contrast to the inner strength that emanates naturally from the Nagô and Jeje priestesses, the male priests of the Angola nation, of the Congo nation or the *taboões* are almost all improvised, self-made, "learning one song here and another song there," as the Nagô and Jeje leaders say (1948/1986:84–86).

A comparison of Carneiro's informal remarks to Landes in 1938–39 with those in his own publication of 1948 suggests that he had not thought of Candomblé's "passives" as much of a secret before 1938. They became a secret only in the wake of published accounts by Ruth Landes, whose revelations triggered a vicious response from Arthur Ramos, a famous Brazilian physician, nationalist, folklorist, sometime state functionary, academic gatekeeper, and culture broker extraordinaire. Faced with a powerful international gaze, Ramos flatly denied Landes's claims about a "cult matriarchate" and a significant homosexual presence in Candomblé. Moreover, he worked hard to foreclose future professional opportunities to Landes after she returned to the United States, enlisting North American anthropologist Melville J. Herskovits in the project of defaming her (Corréa 2000:242–46).

A close observer of Bahia and a close friend of Landes, Carneiro could not deny the newly embarrassing reality, but he was in a position to mar-

ginalize it authoritatively. As he wrote *Candomblés da Bahia* (1948/1986) for publication by the State Museum of Bahia under the collective scrutiny of Arthur Ramos, Ruth Landes, the nationalists, and the international community, Carneiro clearly labored under a kind of self-censorship. His written account deferred self-consciously to nationalist and international notions of respectability. *Candomblés da Bahia*, it seems, was created *para inglês ver*, "for the English to see," a Brazilian expression redolent with the real history of Bahia, in which dissimulation has long been a characteristic response to the foreign gaze (see Fry 1982).

The Penalties of Revelation and the Transformation of Communities

Multilateral debates over which secrets to keep, who can speak them, and in what company, have far-reaching social and material consequences. Indeed, these debates are crucial in shaping scholarly careers and human communities alike. Landes's career, for example, was made and unmade by her revelations. *The City of Women* would eventually bring her fame, but she was unable to hold a job befitting her qualifications after the book's publication. Landes blamed Ramos's anger over her revelation of "homosexuality" for much of her professional undoing (Corréa 2000:246–48).⁹ For three decades after obtaining her Ph.D., Landes was unable to secure a regular academic position (Healey 1998/2000:88).

The controversy Landes provoked seems also to have transformed the material wealth and prestige of Bahia's Candomblé temples, as well as the standards of priestly qualification within each of them, since the mid-twentieth century. The sense, common among Bahia's light-colored elites, that the alleged homosexual presence would diminish their esteem in the eyes of richer regions of Brazil and more "advanced" nations has certainly been one of the motives behind Brazilian scholars' disproportionate attention to—and, later, the Brazilian government's disproportionate financial support and moral endorsement of—female-headed Candomblé temples. Once an embarrassment to the bourgeois nation-state, the Candomblé priestess eventually attained pride of place in Northeastern regionalism and its close ally, Brazilian nationalism. She certainly benefited from her superficial likeness to the Black Mammy (or *Mãe Preta*) who had become an object of nostalgic adulation in Gilberto Freyre's influential narrative of *miséto* nationalism, *Casa-Grande e Senzala* (*The Masters and the Slaves*, 1933/1986). The Candomblé priestess is represented in numerous journalistic accounts as gentle and generous to her white children, but also stern enough to control her black children (see also Silverstein 1979). These are the terms of her incorporation into the nationalist narrative, and they appear to be an equally significant reason why, since

the 1960s, the city government of Salvador, the Bahian state, the Brazilian federal state, businesses, and national media outlets have lent disproportionate moral support and funding to the female-headed temples.

This is not to say that more than a few temples have benefited. It is also worth emphasizing that most Afro-Brazilian women have not benefited at all from their inclusion in the Freyrean narration of regional and national history. In 1980, for example, the average white woman earned 69 percent of the average white man's salary. In turn, the average black man (*preto*) earned only 63 percent, the average black woman (*preta*) only 38 percent, and the average mulatto woman (*parda*) earned only 36 percent of the average white man's earnings. Any casual visitor to Brazil notes immediately that black and mulatto women are egregiously overrepresented among domestic servants, accounting for over 80 percent of that employment category in a society only 45 percent black or mulatto (Agentes de Pastoral Negros 1990: 26, based on the 1980 Brazilian Census [IBGE]; Heringer et al. 1989: 11). Despite omnipresent public affirmations that Brazil is not racist, 60 percent of black and mulatto men avow on surveys that whites are racist; black and mulatto women are even *more* likely (69 percent) to say so, indicating a widespread dissatisfaction with their social experience and offering little evidence to support Landes's view of gender equality in black Brazil or her sense of a general white male preference for Afro-Brazilian *women* over Afro-Brazilian men (Singer 1993: 70; Landes 1953).

In short, my argument is not intended to diminish the important role women have played in the founding and edification of Brazilian Candomblé since the nineteenth century. Rather, it is to reconsider the chronology and conditions of a female triumph that is both recent in genesis and unique in the Yorubá-Atlantic world. Priestesses have always been important leaders in Candomblé, as in its West African antecedents and its contemporary West African Yorubá counterparts. To understand the preeminence they enjoy in Candomblé today, however, one must attend not to a substrate of ancient matriarchal traditions, but to a set of fairly recent cultural interventions that, from the 1930s onward, have enabled a few priestesses to acquire a mighty set of advocates in the overlapping communities of Brazilian nationalism and transnational feminism.

How the Priestesses Use Their Opportunity

Women, in their capacity as wives and mothers, have long occupied a paradigmatic role in the symbolism of the possession priestesses of the Right of Benin. No doubt they did so in nineteenth-century Bahia as well. However, men in both West Africa and Brazil have, for just as long, convincingly appropriated that symbolism in constructing their own priestly authority, and the nineteenth-century evidence suggests that men have always outnumbered

bered women as the chief priests of Bahian Candomblé. The regionalist, nationalist, and transnational feminist sensibilities that converged in Bahia in the 1930s, however, provided significant new symbolic grounds for the authority of the priestesses—grounds that, with equal novelty, delegitimized male priestly authority. Thus, if female chief priests had not always been preeminent in Candomblé, they certainly came to be so in the wake of Landes's intervention and the gradual embrace of Candomblé within the cultural intimacy of the Brazilian nation-state. Since then, women priests have been far more successful than males at making alliances with light-skinned, prosperous, Western-educated men, many of whom classify themselves as white. Women have somehow managed to attract more touristic, journalistic, and ethnographic attention to their houses as well, even in a society as thoroughly patriarchal as Brazil.

For journalists who know nothing about the ritual protocols that insiders regard as the main key to priestly success, another criterion of success, one more accessible to outsiders, has become the focus of commentary: namely, the priestess' talent for cultivating "friends on all social levels" (*amigos em todas as camadas sociais*). Successful priestesses publicly broadcast their interest in fostering extensive, class-crossing friendship networks. Whatever their personalities, ritual competency, or grievances, dark-black and middle-aged-to-elderly women in Bahian society can wittingly or unwittingly take advantage of a well-established cultural image in Brazil, one that is especially useful in attracting those seeking the literal or metaphorical "snuggly embrace" of the black matriarch.

Since the 1990s, this phenomenon has found its greatest exemplar in *Mãe Stella*, who, like a series of Yorubá/Nagô priestesses since *Mãe Aninha*—particularly *Mães Senhora*, *Olga*, and *Menininha*—has ridden the momentum of her illustrious predecessors and, by the force of her own character, has augmented it. *Mãe Stella* was the first priestess offered the opportunity to explain, in the national press, women's preeminence in her religion. Though *Mãe Stella* belittles none of the men whose initiation, knowledge, and "spiritual disposition" qualify them for the priesthood, she, too, joins Landes in characterizing Candomblé as a "matriarchate," for which she offers the following historical and psychological reasons. First, Candomblé was "brought [to Brazil] by three ladies, *Iyás Deta*, *Kala* and *Nassô*, three people from the kingdom of Xângo, who had the courage, even with all the repression, to do their Candomblé." Second, the priestly title "Iyá Nassô" ("Mother Nassô" in Brazilian Nagô) alludes to the fact that a woman is the palace chief and head of the Sàngó priesthood in the Oyo kingdom (see Johnson 1897/1921: 63–4; Babayemi 1979: 16). Third, since female domestic slaves had free time and both the competency and the option to cook, they were also uniquely able "to continue practicing their original religion." Indeed, something in the experience of enslaved and freed Afro-Brazilians

encouraged an extraordinary *elaboration* in the votary cuisine of the gods. Finally, explains Mãe Stella, “I think that a woman always has a special little maternal way of taking care of things. Men too take care, but it is not the same thing.” Thus, she reflects on what draws a following to any given priest: “That doesn’t mean that the man lacks the capacity to be a priest [*babalorixá*]; it’s that the woman is the mother figure, and when people come into a Candomblé temple, they are looking for more of that snugly embrace [*aconchego*]. Women have the capacity to offer more tenderness. It’s just that.”¹⁰

Stella appropriately highlights the importance of the “mother figure,” or the psychological *image* of the mother, since the representational tropes attractive to bourgeois noninitiates are often at odds with the personalities and ritual roles of actual priestesses. For example, many of the chief priestesses of Candomblé are not snugly or affectionate at all, and more than a few are childless by choice. For someone not in search of a conventional “mother” figure, the description of their manner that first comes to mind is “executive.” Moreover, while plenty of male and female initiates *can* cook very well, Candomblé-related “domestic services,” as Carneiro describes them, are preferentially assigned not to just any woman but to women consecrated to female gods (Leão Teixeira 1987:44–45; Azevedo Santos 1993:52–54). In other words, many women are disqualified in principle, and many men are qualified in practice. Such gendered subtleties have been of little interest, however, in the politically purposive analyses of Landes, or the journalists and scholars who have found *City of Women* congenial to the self-image of the *mestiço* nation or to the primitivist search for a real-world matriarchy that appeals to some feminists (see Healey 1998/2000 on Landes’s “primitivism”).

Even Herskovits’s assessment seems more indebted to the gender tropes of the bourgeois nation-state than to his ethnohistorical knowledge of the African diaspora. He argues that women predominate among Candomblé initiates because their time and earnings are more dispensable to the con-sanguineal family than are men’s. However, this argument is surely more a mid-century white bourgeois projection than a reality of most Afro-Brazilian women’s lives. The production of counterfactual images of blacks and Indians in journalism, folklore, and anthropology has been a central element in white creole representations of national community in the New World. And such images—like that of the *Mãe Preta*, or “Black Mammy”—can become the prisons or the tools of the real people so represented.

Priestesses, Too, Question the “Matriarchate”

Notwithstanding the harmony of black female religious authority with white sentimentality about the Black Mammy and with transnational femi-

nist imagery of “cult matriarchy,” leading priestesses’ own talk about gender and authority belies—and at times consciously negates—the simplistic characterization of the Candomblé as “matriarchal.” For instance, *Mãe Stella* and the mothers of the great “traditional” temples *do* tend to avow publicly that women possess a special acumen for priestly duties. The gender of the sacred agency defining their authority, however, often explicitly contrasts with the priestesses’ personal sexual identity. In response to one of the numerous journalists seeking an explanation for the “cult matriarchate,” the chief priestess of Bahia’s adamantly “African” Opô Afojijá temple made it clear that, for her, for her predecessor *Mãe Senhora*, and in the “African tradition” followed by their lineage generally, the consummately *machão* god Xangô has always been the real “boss” (*chefe*).¹¹ Also recall the words of the late *Mãe Nicinha* of the Jeje Bogum temple: “In our nation,” she told a reporter, “the only person who can occupy this post [chief priest] is a woman who has a male saint [i.e., who is consecrated to and possessed by a male god].”¹² As Leão Teixeira (1987) suggests, the very image of divine authority in Candomblé is masculine. In a further example, the sequence in which the gods are saluted during sacred festivals implies an association between maleness and the rank of seniority among the gods. Older or male gods tend to be saluted earlier in the song sequence, or *xirê*, while younger and female gods tend to be saluted later. The unique ritual prerogatives of men and the restrictions placed on menstruating women and on the daughters of goddesses suggest that priestly ritual competency itself is also coded male (Leão Teixeira 1987:43–4, 48).

Even as journalistic and scholarly discourses around Candomblé bubble over in their praise of female priests, it remains the case that Candomblé ritual *marginalizes* females far more than West African *oríṣá*-worship does. In Yorubá *oríṣá*-worship, women priests *are* prohibited from performing certain types of sacrifice, but, as entities who “mount” and are literally addressed as the “husbands” (*okò*) of their worshippers, *goddesses* possess no less authority, competency, or seniority than male gods (Matory 1994). Likewise, in Yorubá family life, a woman’s long-term male sexual partner and all of his kin, male or female, are called her “husbands” (*okò*), and, to all of them, she is a “wife” (*iyáwò*). In Yorubáland, femaleness does not diminish the husbandly authority of a goddess, any more than it diminishes that of a female “husband.” Nor, in Yorubáland, does maleness exclude a man from becoming a *wife* to the gods. What Landes read as the criterion of “femininity” in the service of the Nagô gods (1940:386, 393) seems closely connected to the West African Yorubá criterion of “wifeliness,” which is not restricted to any particular biological sex. Thus, there are some differences between the gender concepts of Candomblé and those of the West African Yorubá religion. What they have in common, however, is just as significant. They both elude de-

scription as "matriarchal," and neither offers much evidence for homophobic readings of African tradition.

If the black priestesses of Bahia have been transformed from national "flaws" into evidence of national ideals, and certain priestesses enjoy ample opportunity to assert themselves in the public sphere, this empowerment can be understood only in relation to the status of male chief priests, who have become a dirty secret and are now thrust into the shadows and subject to new forms of silencing. As the reader will see, the gendered logic specific to Candomblé and the forms of male privilege that structure Brazilian society as a whole nonetheless give male priests a leadership advantage in all but the most highly institutionalized, state-supported, and media-endorsed temples. Thus, the scholarly literatures of Brazilian nationalism and transnational feminism that employ Candomblé as allegory have a skeleton locked in their shared closet: the fact that most Bahians think male Candomblé possession priests, including the heads of temples, are typically *adés*, or as Landes put it, "passive homosexuals." And, far from considering them abnormal, most Bahians have long thought that *adés* are normal in this role. Indeed, the idea of a straight man being possessed or initiated is strange to them.

*Mounted Men: The Overlooked West African Precedents of the Adé Priest*¹³

Years ago, I publicly proposed an explanation for this locally perceived normality of "passive homosexuals," or *adés*, as possession priests and therefore as the heads of temples. The debate it engendered demonstrates that the African diaspora is constituted by secrets and can be reconstituted through rerelections and reinterpretations of secrets that need to be defended. This debate illustrates rather clearly how diasporas are related to other imagined communities—to regions, nations, religions, and transnational feminism—by the manner in which they are connected "intimately" to the same secrets.

There are no reliable statistics on how many Candomblé priests engage in passive homosexuality. Nor does my thesis concern their actual numbers. Rather, I wish 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* and why many Afro-Brazilian men who love men feel at home in Candomblé. Today there are numerous explanations for *adés'* alleged prominence among Candomblé possession priests. Before we can understand them, however, we must identify the set of symbolic contrasts of which the "passive homosexual" in Brazil is part.

English-speaking North Americans tend to distinguish sharply between

men who engage in sex with other men ("homosexuals") and those who do not ("heterosexuals"). By contrast, 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*) (Fry 1986, 1982). Brazilians share this pattern of classification with many circum-Mediterranean peoples, as well as much of premodern Europe, Native America, and most of the rest of the world (Trexler 1995). A contrast between penetrator and penetrated is not the only classification available in Brazil (see Jackson 2000; Kulick 1998; Parker 1998, 1991; Green 1999). However, this particular idiom of sexuality and power is central to most working-class Bahians' vocabulary and negotiation of respect. Even when the Bahians I know use the term *homossexual*, most are referring only to the party in sexual intercourse who is assumed to be habitually penetrated, or "passive." Of course, the real behavior 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 both in the sexual act and in the nonsexual dimensions of the relationship is often more fantasy than reality (Kulick 1998). However, local *ideological* assumptions and expectations tend to link habitual male "passivity" with transvestism, feminine gestures and occupations, and with the social subordination of the penetrated party.

Why do many Cubans and Brazilians think there is a connection between the possession priesthood and men who love men? Cuban and Puerto Rican adherents of Ocha have told me of the affinity of the goddesses Ochún and Yemayá with *addodis*, or penetrated men.¹⁴ Cuban and Puerto Rican priests also note what they believe to be distinctive levels of prosperity, mobility, and tastefulness enjoyed by such men, qualities that have enabled them disproportionately to spread the Cuban Ocha religion to new locales. Of the Brazilian case, anthropologist 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 (1969) and Mary Douglas (1966), Fry argues that the *liminal* status of homosexuals in Brazilian national society links them symbolically, in the Brazilian popular imagination, to professions dealing with "magical power" (Fry 1986: 138). Various sources do indeed report that male and female homosexuals are generally thought to make superior mediums and that women, who also predominate among temple clients, often prefer male homosexual to male heterosexual priests (Lima 1983: 180–82; Leão Teixeira 1987: 49–50).

It must be acknowledged that Fry's analysis is far removed from the psychological framework and pathologizing conclusions of Landes and her successors, Bastide (1961: 309) and Ribeiro (1969: 109–120). Fry's is a symbolic analysis of local images of "magical power" and the role of *inversion* within

them. However, in my opinion, the representation of Afro-Brazilian cultural practice as abnormal or inverted is Eurocentric, projecting European readings of the European *Carnaval* onto Afro-Brazilian culture as a whole. Despite the best intentions, this model prioritizes nationalist logics of respectability and normalcy over the distinctly Afro-Brazilian forms of symbolism, logic, hierarchy, and planning that shape these religions. Afro-Brazilian culture ends up looking like a form of "letting loose," a sort of compartmentalized abandom. Indeed, the Europeanist model of *Carnaval* as social inversion has limited applicability even to the Brazilian *Carnaval*.

Lima moves in the direction of acknowledging what is *normal* about homosexuality in Candomblé. He argues that both Afro-Brazilian religions and Spiritism have generally shown themselves more *tolerant* than the Roman Catholic Church (1983: 167ff). More to the point, Birman shows that Candomblé provides a rationalization for the feminine personalities and homosexual desires of some men. That is, men whose heads are governed by female divinities are expected to share in the female dispositions and desires of the goddesses (Birman 1985; also Leão Teixeira 1987:48; and Landes 1940:395).¹⁵ 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 authorized by the sacred; hence, their attraction to and acceptance in Candomblé.

Fry observes that *bichas*, or "passives," enjoy an advantageous flexibility in the performance of social roles normally reserved primarily for one sex or the other. That is, they can do the cooking and embroidery necessary for the temple, and yet, in Belém do Pará (where Fry conducted his research), they 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" (Fry 1986: 147–49). In the Bahian case, however, men's advantages over the great Yorùbá/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 Candomblé three other advantages over women: (1) the higher average earnings of men; (2) their license as men to perform all the ritual duties normally *restricted* to men, such as the sacrifice of four-legged animals, the care of the gods Exú (of sex, mischief, and communication) and Ossaim (of herbal medicine) and of the Eguns, or spirits of the dead; and (3) their immunity to the restrictions placed upon menstruating women, who may not, for example, enter the shrine rooms.¹⁶ A woman consecrated to a male god is eligible to receive a further initiation (*nião de faca*) that entitles her to sacrifice birds, but, while menstruating, such an initiated woman cannot even sacrifice birds (Leão Teixeira 1987:44–5; see Azevedo Santos 1993: 52–54 on the servile status of women consecrated to female *orixás*).

My main point is that "cult patriarchy" is not a fact that arises logically out of "tradition." Instead, it is a plausible but *interested* and *contested* construction of tradition. Despite the pronounced homophobia of many Third-World bourgeois nationalists (including a number of prominent Anglophone African elites), one would be hard-pressed to locate the precolonial, "traditional" Yorùbá precedents for the homophobia that Landes, Ribeiro, and Bastide have tried to pass off as psychoanalytic proof of the unsuitability of male priests in the Yorùbá-affiliated Candomblé Nagô. The homophobia that abnormalizes the prominence of "passives" in the Candomblé priesthood has its origins not in aboriginal Africa but in the nationalism and transnational feminism of the mid-twentieth century.

I believe that the proliferation of latter-day explanations of the prominence of "passives" in Brazilian Candomblé and Cuban Ocha priesthoods, and the well-documented history of Candomblé adherents' comfort with *adés* in this role, share a common root. It is evident between the lines of informant testimony in Landes's work in the 1930s, and it is clearly implied by the historical work of James H. Sweet (1996), who argues that transvestites, including homosexual transvestites, were once common in West-Central and southern Africa and that some of these homosexual transvestites were important ritual experts. Such ritual experts, he argued, embodied a set of African "core beliefs" that, as a result of the slave trade, appeared among captives from that region in sixteenth- and seventeenth-century Portugal and Brazil as well. Sweet inverts the Third-World nationalist cliché that homosexuality is a "white man's disease" corrupting the purity of the nation and its "traditional" culture, arguing instead that the *lapse* of homosexuality and transvestism among West-Central African male ritual experts in the post-colonial period resulted from Western missionary and colonial influence.

Though inattentive to these West-Central African traditions, Carneiro argued that male priests (whom he assumed were passive homosexuals) were virtually restricted to the West-Central African-identified Angola and Congo nations (1967:265, 1948/1986:104–106). Male priests, he argued, were "exceptions" deviating from the traditions of the West African-identified Jeje and Nagô nations. The sixteenth- and seventeenth-century records analyzed by Sweet leave unexplained the cultural logic by which West-Central Africans (such as the eponyms of the Congo and Angola nations of Bahia) and their descendants believed ritual expertise to be logically connected to transvestism and homosexual transvestism, or the degree to which they believed the connection to be a strong or necessary one. The historical and ethnographic records of the twentieth century have, however, left evidence of a strong connection precisely in the trans-Atlantic nations of the West African Yorùbá/Nagô/Lucumí and the Jeje, or Ewe/Gen/Aja/Fon-speakers. Moreover, at least in the present day, the shared Yorùbá, Ewe/

Gen/Aja/Fon (E.G.A.F.), and Brazilian Candomblé imagery of marriage to the divinity, who then episodically displaces its bride's personality and consciousness, is foreign to West-Central African religions (Wyatt MacGaffey, personal communication, 1996).

Metaphors of horsemanship, blood kinship, birth, seniority, and marriage shape the sartorial and verbal representation of possession and possession priests among the West African Yorùbá and E.G.A.F.-speakers, and there is every indication that such metaphors were prominent among their eighteenth- and nineteenth-century ancestors. With the financial and political backing of the Òyó Empire, the Šàngó priesthood's manipulation of gender and equestrian symbolism in particular became a critical instrument of political legitimization. Since the collapse of the Empire and the dispersion of its subjects to the New World, these metaphors have undergone multiple reinterpretations suited to the new contexts of their invocation, both in West Africa and at the various sites of New World *orixá*-worship (Matony 1994). A comparison among contemporary West African, Brazilian, Cuban, and Haitian iconography suggests some common, gendered patterns in the representation of spirit possession among these West African-inspired religions, and Bahian testimony recorded in the 1930s suggests what precedents had to be made secret as feminist scholars, Brazilian nationalists, and, lately, Yorùbá nationalists have each in turn invoked communities through the play of cultural intimacy.

Òyó-Yorùbá worshippers employ and mix multiple metaphors to evoke the nature of people's relationships to the gods. Like Brazilian *candomblécistas*, West African Yorùbá worshippers of the *orixá* gods might call any devotee of a god the "child" (*omó* [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 Šàngó might be addressed as *Bábá Onišàngó* ("Father Owner-of-Šàngó"); a senior priestess would be addressed as *Iyá Onišàngó* ("Mother Owner-of-Šàngó"). 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 the priest's competency to embody the god and act as his or her worldly delegate rely above all on allied metaphors of marriage and sexuality. According to Edison Carneiro, these metaphors were very much alive in the Brazilian Candomblé of the 1930s, and they were present in local understandings of 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 effect in communicative and stipulative acts; rather, its effect has become naturalized and implicit. In present-day Brazilian Candomblé, meta-

phors of marriage and sexuality stand powerfully alongside metaphors of parenthood and birth in the often-contested representation and reproduction of the priesthood.

Most Òyó-Yorùbá possession priests in West Africa are women. 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" (*yáwó*), a term that otherwise refers only to women married to worldly men. Novices to the priesthood—male or female—are designated metaphorically as *yáwó*, meaning "brides" or "wives." Indeed, Òyó-Yorùbá people not only formed a plurality of the African captives taken to Bahia in the nineteenth century but also furnished the founding priests and priestesses of Bahia's most influential temples. The degree to which Bahians understand the cognate term *iáwó* 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 twenty-first century. The overlapping implications of West African Ewe-Gen-Aja-Fon vocabulary of spirit possession have faded a bit more since the eighteenth-century era, when these captives predominated in the slave trade to Bahia. In that West African cultural zone, too, most possession priests are women, but there are also numerous men. As in Yorùbáland, male and female possession priests in the E.G.A.F.-speaking region are generically called "wives" (*sí*) of their divinities. However, chief priests in the E.G.A.F. region are called "mothers" (*ipe*) of the god, regardless of their sex.

For months after the initiation, male and female Òyó-Yorùbá novices wear women's clothes: *iró* (wrap skirts), *bùbá* (blouses), and *òjá* (baby-carrying slings); specifically on ceremonial occasions, they also wear *tiró* (antimony eyeliner), *lálá* (henna for the hands and feet), delicate bracelets, earrings, and so forth. As mature priests, or *elégún*, women and men braid their hair, and they also continue to don *tiró* eyeliners, henna, and delicate jewelry. Many uninitiated Yorùbá women do these things but, as far as I know, male possession priests are the only men who do so. In the Òyó-Yorùbá town where I conducted my principal West African field research, both the stripweaving of cloth and barkeeping are considered female professions. So, almost predictably, the only male strip-weaver and the only male barkeeper in the town are Šàngó possession priests.

Yet the most pervasive and dramatic gendered symbol in the representation of the priests' symbolic role in relation to the gods—from initiation onward—is the complex web of metaphors implicit in the verb *gùn*—meaning "to mount" or "to climb." Indeed, the term for "possession priest" (*elégún*) means "the mounted one." The term refers to what a rider does to a horse (hence, by analogy, possession priests are sometimes called "horses of

the gods" [*ṣṣin òrìṣá*]). The term *gùn* also refers to what an animal or a brutal man does sexually to his female partner (and possession by *Ṣàngó* is often spoken of as a brutal act).¹⁷ The term *gùn* also refers to what a god—especially *Ṣàngó*—does to his possession priests. And *Ṣàngó's* is the most influential possession priesthood not only on the Bight of Benin but, to an even greater extent, among the *òrìṣá*-worshippers of Brazil, Cuba, Trinidad, and the United States. However we translate the verb *gùn* into English, the term *mount* in Caribbean Spanish and Brazilian Portuguese, and the Haitian Kweyòl term *monite* (all cognates of the English verb "to mount"), encode the same three referents: horseback riding, sexual penetration, and spirit possession.

Duly warned by my colleague Wande Abimbola, I acknowledge that the English gloss "to climb" better captures the fact that many *òrìṣá* (though not *Ṣàngó*) are regarded as *rising* from the ground rather than descending from above. But this gloss fails to encode the equestrian and sexual implications that are implicit in the terms *esin* ("horse"), *iyànò* ("bride" or "wife"), and *gùn*. In fact, the main virtue of the gloss "to climb" is precisely that it sublimates the equestrian and sexual implications of the folk terminology that might appear to stigmatize the religion in the eyes of mightier religions and nations. Hence, it is not my aim (nor is it within my competency) to contradict Abimbola, who is a widely traveled *babaláwo* diviner, spokesperson of the priesthood at its Ife heartland, and university professor. Rather, it is to illustrate both the historical roots of a range of such reinterpretations of *òrìṣá* religions and the forms of cultural intimacy that appear to shape them.

Let me illustrate, then, how Afro-Latins—such as the priests and cognoscenti of the Bahian Candomblé—still construed these West African Yorùbá metaphors in the 1930s, at the time of Landes's research in Bahia. These are Carneiro's words, quoted in Ruth Landes's *City of Women*:

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, emphasis added).

This parlance is largely consistent with the West African, *Ọ̀yọ̀*-Yorùbá symbolism of spirit possession I observed among Nigerian *Ṣàngó* priests of both sexes in the 1980s, but for one detail: the prohibition on the participation of "real men" in the Brazilian Candomblé possession priesthood. Sex

was not an infrequent topic of conversation among male friends of my age group in Igbòho, and the *Ṣàngó* priests of both sexes in the town were vocal, and ribald in their humor, about the matter. Yet I never became aware of any commonly used vocabulary in *Ọ̀yọ̀*-Yorùbá language to distinguish "upright men" from a category of men who are "homosexual" or somehow like women.¹⁸ I have never heard any West African *òrìṣá* 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 *reinterpreted* 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." In other words, a physically mountable man seems highly qualified, in a symbolic sense, to be mounted spiritually, and a spiritually mountable man is strongly suspected of sexual mountability, or "passivity." The metaphor-ridden "loophole" by which Carneiro and his priestly friends understood men to have recently entered the Yorùbá/Quétó/Nagó possession priesthood in the 1930s was virtually identical—in both its terms and its emphasis—to the dominant logic of the *Ọ̀yọ̀*-Yorùbá *Ṣàngó* priesthood that I observed in the 1980s and others had observed in similar terms since as long as that West African priesthood had been studied (Matory 1994:171).¹⁹ Therefore, my argument has long been that the prominence of *adés* in the Candomblé priesthood is a reinterpretation of the sacred male transvestism of *Ọ̀yọ̀*-Yorùbá priests.

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's view that "shouting" in black North American churches is a "reinterpretation" of African spirit possession (Herskovits 1941/1958:211–16). 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.²⁰ I have never said or believed that the West African transvestite priests were or are in any sense homosexual (Matory 1994:208, 1991:22, 520–21, 538). While many have embraced the argument as logical and empirically sound, others have found it easy to misinterpret, either as proof that homosexuality is as widespread and natural in Africa as it is in the West (Murray 1998:100; personal communication, 1996) or as a defamation of authentic, "traditional" Yorùbá culture (Oyewumi 1997:117).

At the time of my research in Igbòho, 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 *biçha* or *adé* category. Imagine my sur-

prise when I made the acquaintance of a highly respected Yorùbá art historian from Òyó, whose extended family included many Šàngó priests in the town. During his time among oricha-worshippers in the United States, this scholar also became aware of the importance of men who love men in the priesthood. Without having read my work, he had concluded that male-male sexual conduct among New-World priests was a *continuation* rather than a 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 on this unique testimony, which the original observer (with a sense of cultural intimacy) has shared with me privately but has himself 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 (for example, R. Abiọdun 1989; Awẹ 1977; Fadipe 1939/1970; Okediji and Okediji 1966; Ogunḍipe-Leslie 1985). However, those discussions have acquired new dimensions and new content as the numbers of Yorùbá scholars in the diaspora have increased, as have the occasions for their interaction with New World priests of the Cuban *orichas*, Brazilian *orixás*, and African American *orishas*. In this context, my argument has recently sparked controversy in a new diasporic community, that of Yorùbá scholars and African American priestesses of Yorùbá religion in the United States.

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” practicing symbolic if not actual homosexuality (Oyewumi 1997:117). I regard this summary as a deliberate misrepresentation of my words and of my argument, but what is more important is (1) the deep feeling of offense it clearly expresses and (2) the author’s rhetorical effort to classify “homosexuals” as Other to a new diaspora nationalism. This caricature of my work was but one link in Oyewumi’s argument: that there is no gender in authentic Yorùbá culture. Like Freyre, Oyewumi attempts to turn the tables on North American and Western European cultural and racial chauvinism. She does so, however, not through vivid storytelling but through caricatures of the absolute 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, by a per-

son’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, and (despite her citation of several scholarly works that discuss third genders or relational gender) that the analytic term “gender” always imposes a binary or dichotomy upon its referents (Oyewumi 1997:ix–xxi, 1–17; see also Amadiume 1987 and Matory 1994 and 1991 for nondichotomous treatments of gender relations in southern Nigerian cultures).

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, where, she asserts, people’s anatomical sex “did not privilege them to any social positions and similarly did not jeopardize their access” (ibid.:78). Only one’s age relative to other people, and the family to which one belongs, the author continues, 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”), *ọniọ* (“child”), *ẹgbòni* (“senior sibling or cousin”), *ọba* (“monarch”), *Bàbá Èléràn* (“butcher [lit., “Senior-Male Owner-of-Meat”]), and *Ìyá Aláṣọ* (“clothing [lit., “Senior-Female Owner-of-Cloth”]).

Oyewumi spends much of her argument explaining away or concealing the gender coding that actually does appear in much Yorùbá terminology and social practice. For example, there are clearly words in Yorùbá for “male” (*akọ*), “female” (*abọ*), “man” (*ọkunrin*), and “woman” (*ọbirin*). 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 Ayọ* (the tekonymic “Father of Ayọ”), *Bàbá Èléràn* (“butcher”), and *Ìyá mi* (“Mommy”). Most professions in Yorùbáland have (and have long had) vastly more of one sex than another practicing them, and virtually all social clubs (*ẹgbẹ*) 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”]), *baálẹ* (nonroyal quarter or town chief [lit., “father of the land”]), *iyálẹ* (eldest wife of the house [lit., “mother of the house”]), and *baálẹ* (head of residential compound [lit., “fa-

ther of the house"). It should be noted that these last two terms are *etymologically* distinguished *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 *iyáláde* (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. Moreover, the fact that there are a few female *baálá*, or "village chiefs," near Oyewumi's hometown should not allow us to overlook the male gendering of power 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 (1997: 41, 49, 75, 77).

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, 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 honored of Yorùbá institutions, but, given her peculiar definition of "gender," she takes this observation to illustrate the absence of gender in Yorùbá society (*ibid.*: 75). The author 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 labor. 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" (Oyewumi 1997: 61–2). Most of Oyewumi's claims are inconsistent with my observations in Òyò North, Ibadán, and Lagos during the 1980s and 1990s, and with other scholars' 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 reflect little knowledge of what has been described as gendered in Western marriage and social life.

The levirate 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 practiced without the widow's consent. Court records from the early twentieth century indicate that adultery was often severely punished, and women were sometimes forced, on threat of violence, to remain in marriages that they wished to leave (Matory 1994: 28–44). 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. These facts are not easily dismissed.

Oyewumi focuses great attention upon linguistic evidence because any claim that present-day Yorùbá culture fails to distinguish men from women or that it offers 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 colonization 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 elides all historical periods that preceded the slave trade and colonization 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 means. For example, *bábi* ("father" or "senior man") and *iyá* ("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" (*iyawó*) 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 is also ungendered? Moreover, 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 ever infer from the gender-neutral English terms "parent," "cousin," "sibling," "child," "president," "prime minister," and "governor" that Anglo-Saxon or Western language and culture are in their essence or once were free of gender and 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. In this argument, there is a measure of both ethnological naivete and intellectual dishonesty.

Indeed, Oyewumi's argument neatly parallels Gilberto Freyre's claim that Brazil is a "racial democracy" (opposite in character to the United States and the rest of the Euro-Atlantic world) and that analyses of race and racism in Brazil result from the imposition of an imperialist North American logic (Freyre 1933/1986). 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). 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 also formulated his influential sociomoral allegory during and following his sojourn in the United States. Both arguments rely on the construction of an idyllic past beyond immediate scrutiny. They equally invoke a sense of national honor around the decision 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 way in Brazil as it does in the United States, but "racism" is a useful analytic category by which to analyze, and rethink, 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 analyze the empirical turf Oyewumi considers: the diversity of female roles and powers in Yorùbá society, the ways in which they overlap with men's powers, and the way these differ from the arrangements of roles and powers in other societies. Oyewumi's redefinition of gender does little more than flatten both "the Yorùbá conception" and "the West" into opposite stereotypes. The text itself vilifies not only "the West" but also those eminent Yorùbá scholars whose interpretations differ from Oyewumi's, dismissing theirs as foreign to "the Yorùbá conception" (1997:68). Thus, a pattern of arbitrary essentialization of Yorùbá culture extends not only to her analysis of ethnographically observed, oral historical, and archival materials but also to her critiques of the work of fellow scholars.

A (Culturally) Intimate Gathering of Priests and Scholars

Since Gilberto Freyre organized the First Afro-Brazilian Congress in 1934, dozens of such conferences have brought together priests and scholars intent on rethinking and reorganizing *orìṣà* religion. Several conferences have had momentous effects. For example, the 1937 Congress organized by Edison

Carneiro in Bahia culminated in the organization of the Union of Afro-Brazilian Sects, the first organization to unite the Bahian temples and their supporters against police repression. In 1983, Wande Abimbola and Maria Moreno Vega organized at the University of Ife, Nigeria, the first World Conference of Orisha Tradition and Culture. For the first time a conference brought together scholars and priests of *orìṣà* religion from Brazil, Cuba, Puerto Rico, Trinidad, the United States, and Nigeria. A dozen such conferences have followed, albeit under an increasingly factionalized leadership. It is against this backdrop that events at a 1999 conference at Florida International University acquire their significance. Titled "*Orìṣà* Devotion as a World Religion: The Globalization of Yorùbá Religious Culture," this conference brought together dozens of U.S.-based Nigerian, Cuban, Puerto Rican, and native North American scholars with priests of equally diverse national origins.

Whatever its scholarly inadequacies, Oyewumi's argument received a standing ovation from a number of New World *orìṣà* priestesses in attendance at the F.I.U. conference. One of the priestesses told me that she liked Oyewumi's presentation because of Oyewumi's assertiveness, because she delivered it *ex tempore*, and because she seemed to know what she was talking about. In an apparent effort to support Oyewumi's argument, several senior Yorùbá scholars in attendance offered further examples of Yorùbá gender configurations that might surprise most Americans, such as the Yorùbá practice of calling one's patrilineal relatives *bàbá* (normally meaning "father" or "senior man") and matrilineal relatives *iyá* (normally meaning "mother" or "senior woman") in certain contexts. One Yorùbá philosophy professor shared with me his strong agreement with Oyewumi but seemed to feel less enthusiastic when I asked him to consider the implications of viri-patrilocal postmarital residence, whereby a 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 always be secondary to those of anyone born in the house. When space and resources are limited in her natal home, her claims even there will be subordinate to those of her male agnates, and the rights of her descendants will be subordinate to those of male agnates' descendants. These structural disadvantages affect females systematically, above and beyond the structural experiences shared by persons of the same age, persons of the same kin group, persons of the same profession, and persons with the same amount of money or number of well-placed social contacts.

Others among the senior Yorùbá scholars in attendance restricted their

comments to private conversations. One told me that Oyewumi's argument was not significant enough to challenge, though this same scholar apparently advocated for the book to receive the Herskovits Prize of the African Studies Association. Another believed that the culturally appropriate mode of criticism had already been undertaken—that is, some Yorùbá scholars refused to endorse it when asked privately by official agencies. Two scholars told me that public criticism of a junior scholar by senior scholars would have been regarded in Yorùbá culture as bullying (*ḡbàḡá*). Yet a female Yorùbá feminist scholar who organized a roundtable at the 2002 African Studies Association meetings in order to contest Oyewumi's conclusions believed that the male Yorùbá scholars in question were trying to silence criticism of Oyewumi's argument because her book reflects positively on them, as it exonerates Yorùbá men of sexism. Thus, in multiple ways, my argument that Yorùbá gender relations and religious symbolism contained precedents for the prominence of *adés* in the Candomblé priesthood clearly became an object of embarrassment to this diasporic vision of the Yorùbá past and to the communities that defend its selective presentation in public.

Moreover, 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 (selection committee member, personal communication, 2001). The structural nostalgia that has united the Sex and Gender Section of the A.S.A. in common cause with Yorùbá long-distance nationalism is new in some details but is logically similar to the reasoning that united Brazilian nationalism with Landes's transnational feminism. Two years after the F.I.U. Conference, a New World priestess told me she had forgotten the contents of Oyewumi's presentation. What she remembered more was that, despite claiming to represent a traditional African culture, Oyewumi herself did not wear African clothes. This priestess' notion of authenticity and its proper spokespersons remained different from Oyewumi's. Nonetheless, the issue of gender in Yorùbá religion and culture generally is likely to arise at many future conferences of this sort. The debates that ensue will penetrate the community of worshippers and inspire the creation of new traditions and new cultural intimacies.

Conclusion

My point is that diasporas, like nation-states, propagate secrets and defend their own intimate zones. Diasporas often share the *materia prima* of secrets with other, overlapping communities, including regions, nations, civilizations, and transnational social movements. Moreover, these communities regularly contest and reinterpret each other's secrets. In doing so, they in-

spire the social transformation of the communities that defend those secrets. Implicit is the understanding that the cultural phenomena that nationalists and advocates of reformist movements would hide because they are supposed to be anomalous (and therefore unreal) regularly follow a complex semiotic and social logic of their own, a logic that is subject to politically conditioned historical change, just like any other dimension of culture. The meaning of ritual metaphors is not fixed; the implications of any given metaphor are selectively "highlighted" or "hidden" depending on the personal or political project at hand. Across history, across different nation-states, different regions and different priesthoods, and within the same local priesthood, diverse interests might favor equally diverse readings of the same metaphor. However, like all semantic articulations, ritual metaphors retain traces of their past uses and the aims of past users: any current invocation owes part of its convincingness, its appropriateness, and its meaning to the *history* of its usage.

It is perhaps now easier to understand why—and on whose terms—sentimental and feminist-inspired favoritism toward black women became such an important force in the history of Candomblé. However, such favoritism does not explain why Afro-Brazilians would be likely to believe in female priests in the first place, and the popularity of reputedly "passive homosexual" priests *entirely* escapes explanation in terms of Euro-Brazilian attitudes or sponsorship. From the nineteenth century onward, the preponderance of bourgeois European and Euro-American opinion has labeled these men as a pathological type. In fact, the presence of women *and* male "passives" side-by-side in the Candomblé leadership hints at the far older, West African ideological precedents of the gender arrangements in Candomblé possession religion.

Several female-headed Candomblé temples are now officially registered and preserved as monuments of the Brazilian National Patrimony.²¹ The great Jeje and Nagô mothers have been able to secure such a position for their temples by dint of their personal ingenuity, their knowledge of state politics, and their deft management of the Brazilian nationalist imaginary. Yet it has taken no less genius—and no less prestigious a trans-Atlantic precedent—for the *fathers* of various Candomblé nations to secure an honored place in the Afro-Brazilian patrimony. It is *they* who have relentlessly faced down the resistance of a powerful, homophobic class of Brazilian nationalists and international opinion makers.

Notes

1. See also Parker, Russo, Sommer and Yaeger (1992).
2. The priest said sex has nothing to do with his religion, a statement that could be construed in multiple ways. Clearly, sacred duties require various periods of sex-

ual abstinence, and many a god requires his or her devotees to abstain and to sleep separately from their spouses on the day of the week devoted to that god. While the conduct of sacred affairs excludes sexuality, this very prohibition manifests the widespread analogy between sacred affairs and the sexual conduct they exclude.

3. Exceptionally, Šàngó priests in Igbòho often speak openly about sex across age groups.
4. The discretion with which Yorùbá people discuss "witchcraft" (*ijé*) and female barrenness further supports the hypothesis that concerted silence about a phenomenon need not suggest its unimportance.
5. See Matory (1999a) on the trans-Atlantic and recent genesis of the "Yorùbá" ethnic category and Matory (1999b) on the similar genesis of the "Jeje" ethnic category, as well as the colonial-era political struggles and literary movements by which groups so named acquired unparalleled prestige among African-inspired ethnic groups in the Americas.
6. I describe Landes as a transnational feminist not because her scholarly contribution is reducible by any means to a feminist project, though her effort to present Brazil as a living counterexample to Western gender inequality and racism was clearly a major part of her intent in writing *The City of Women*. It is also true that much that Landes misrepresented in Candomblé is designed to support international resistance to sexism and racism (Healey 1998:2000). Equally important, however, is the fact that her writings have been embraced as truthful and her person adopted as a hero of cosmopolitan feminism by numerous feminist scholars and many members of the general public, including Simone de Beauvoir, Sally Cole, Kim D. Butler, and Rachel E. Harding (see Matory, forthcoming).
7. In the nineteenth-century record, there is evidence of a significant number of male priests even in the leadership of the Jeje and the Nagô (or Yorùbá) nations (Harding 2000:71–4, 77, 103; Carneiro 1948/1986:57, 104–109; Butler 1998:193, 195; Wimberly 1998:82–5).
8. See also Wikan (1977) on the Omani construction of the male homosexual *xanith* as the antitype of the good woman and as symbolic evidence of women's procreancy generally.
9. Indeed, Landes's 1940 article "A Cult Matriarchate and Male Homosexuality" not only asserts the numerical importance of "passive homosexuals" in Candomblé but also identifies a dozen such men by name and describes them in the most detailed meaning terms possible. However, Ramos's offense did not seem to derive from her violation of these men's privacy and good name.
10. Mãe Stella's testimony is taken from Hamilton Vieira, "A história do Axé Opô Afonjá na homenagem a Mãe Stella," AT, 14 Sept 1989, 2^o Caderno, p.3 (Pasta 324, AT archives); "Mãe Stella: 'Se nós não preservamos a natureza viva, termina tudo,'" AT, 30 April 1995, 2^o Caderno, p.1, Recorte de Jornais, Bahiatursa office, Salvador; "Sete décadas da estrela do Afonjá," TB, 27 April 1995, Recorte de Jornais, Bahiatursa office, Salvador.
11. See Hamilton Vieira, "A história do Axé Opô Afonjá na homenagem a Mãe Stella," *A Tarde*, 14 Sept. 1989, 2^o Caderno (Pasta 324, AT archives); "Mãe Stella: 'Se nós não preservamos a natureza viva, termina tudo,'" *A Tarde*, 30 April 1995, 2^o Caderno, p.1, Recorte de Jornais, Bahiatursa office, Salvador.

12. "Cirrum' começou no Bogum e 'Camô' é a nova yalorixá," *A Tarde*, 30 Dec. 1975, p.3

13. I have presented the main body of this argument in *Sex and the Empire That Is No More* (Matory 1994) and "Homens montados: homossexualidade e simbolismo da possessão nas religiões afro-brasileiras" (Matory 1988).

14. A category of men known as *maricás* or *adidodis* has for decades been identified as common in the Yorùbá-affiliated denomination of Afro-Cuban religion called *Regla de Ocha* or Lucumi. They are said to be protected by the goddesses Yemayá and Ochún, who love them dearly. See Lydia Cabrera (1954/1983:56) and Rómulo Lachatañeré (1939/1992:223–224). The earlier of these written accounts dates from the same period as Landes's observations about homosexuals in the Brazilian Candomblé.

15. A number of sex-*changing*, or ambisexual, divinities (like Logumédé and Oxumaré) are said to inspire and legitimize the same-sex desires of their male worshippers. Birman also observes the cultural controversy over whether men start out homosexual, even if their natal relationship to a given divinity made them so, or are turned into homosexuals during the initiation process. Though Birman attributes the former view to priests and the latter to outsiders, some priests have told me that an unscrupulous priest could indeed change the sexual preference of initiands by placing a certain leaf under their sleeping mats in the initiation room.

16. As Andrews shows, men of any given social race earn more on average than the women of that category (1992:252). It has also been observed that, in 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 (*Vízia*, 12 May 1993, pp.52–59). For an explanation of the term "social race," which I use in the absence of an alternative generic term for Brazilian color and status categories, see Wagley 1952/1963:14 and Degler 1971:105.

17. In a probative contrast, the term *ináguin* (lit. "don't mount") refers to a "medicine," or magical application, that kills the paramour of a married woman at the moment he attempts to penetrate her.

18. In contemporary Yorùbá, there is a rarely used term for "butt fuckers" (*adú-firé*; literally, "one-who-fucks-the-anus"). However, I have yet to meet any native Yorùbá-speakers who can confidently specify any category of persons to which it refers. My wife had long thought it meant "vagina fucker" but still could not say whom the term is used to describe. Thus, besides being of rare and obscure usage, the term fails to unite *penetrated* persons within any verbal category. Nor, in any obvious way, does it imply that the penetrated party is male.

19. 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.

20. That is, among the West African Yorùbá, *men* prostrate themselves flat on the ground, while the *iyikáá* (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. A person governed by a male saint salutes elders and altars with the *idbábáí*, whereas a person governed by a female saint performs the *iyikáá*.

21. See "Terreiro Casa Branca, uma decisão histórica da Sphan," ESP, 1 June 1984 (Pasta 22.844, ESP archives); Aureliano Biancarelli, "Estado tomba terreiro de candomblé de SP," FSP, 3 May 1990 (Pasta 22.844, ESP archives); "Bogum quer tombamento para preservar o seu bissecular Terreiro," AT, 24 July 1986, Caderno 2°.

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- Stanford University Press
Stanford, California
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- Printed in the United States of America on acid-free, archival-quality paper.
- Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data
Off stage/on display : intimacy and ethnography in the age of public culture / edited by Andrew Shryock.
p. cm.
Includes bibliographical references and index.
ISBN 0-8047-5006-8 (cloth : alk. paper)—ISBN 0-8047-5007-6 (pbk. : alk. paper)
1. Ethnology—Congresses. 2. Intimacy (Psychology)—Congresses. 3. Privacy—Congresses. 4. Mass media and culture—Congresses. 5. Group identity—Congresses. 6. Popular culture—Congresses. I. Shryock, Andrew.
GN320.O35 2004
306.4—dc22
- Original Printing 2004
Last figure below indicates year of this printing:
13 12 11 10 09 08 07 06 05 04
Typeset by G&S Typesetters, Inc., in 10.5/12 Bembo