



Tradition, Transnationalism, and Gender in the Afro-Brazilian Candomblé

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Candomblé is an Afro-Brazilian religion of divination, blood sacrifice, spirit possession, and healing. Believers attribute miraculous powers and exemplary flaws to gods known as *orixás*, *voduns*, *inquices*, and *cabochos*, depending upon the Candomblé denomination. The adventures, personalities, and kinship relations of these beings are described in an extensive mythology and body of oracular wisdom, which divines the personalities and fates of worshippers, including the worldly relations among them. Through blood sacrifice and lavish ceremonies of spirit possession, the gods are persuaded to intervene beneficently in the lives of their worshippers and to keep their foes away. Priests and practitioners, no less than the social scientists and politicians who seek to speak for them, tend to emphasize the ancientness of Candomblé and its constituent traditions.

In this essay, however, I document a series of international dialogues involving Afro-Brazilian priests alongside state officials and an international community of scholars with the aim of tracing fundamental changes in the gendered leadership of this religion during the twentieth century. I will argue that Candomblé owes much of its international fame and also the internal transformation of its leadership to Ruth Landes's *City of Women* (1947), in which the religion becomes a living, time-honored example of patriarchy that should inspire the opponents of sexism back home in the United States. But Candomblé has also been a convenient template for very different political agendas that depend on the opposite, manly character of the cult. From Gilberto Freyre's "Regionalist" nationalism, to Melville J. Herskovits's effort to redeem African Americans from the "myth" that they are cultureless, to Oyeronke Oyewumi's diasporic Yoruba nationalism, women hardly count. Both scholars and political leaders have presented Candomblé as a metonym of the imagined communities they would invoke and lead.¹

The realities of Candomblé resist these agendas and normative dispositions. For example, a silent touchstone in the transnational debates over the

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meaning of Candomblé and the communities it authenticates is a cultural persona, as normal in the Candomblé priesthood as he is anathema to the modern nation-state. He is the *ade*, or “passive homosexual.” The Brazilian *ade* priest, like his counterparts in the African-inspired religions of Cuba and Haiti, is eminently respectable for most devotees but has, since the 1930s, been summarily dismissed both by nationalist and feminist scholars as either untraditional or nonexistent. I offer this essay to correct what I believe is wrongheaded scholarship and also to observe the role of national and international scholars in canonizing imaginaries of geographically bounded and historically inert folk traditions.

The City of Women

Ruth Landes became a foremother of feminist anthropology when she celebrated the unique status of women in Candomblé. Her book *The City of Women* claimed that, by tradition, women were uniquely suited to serve the African gods. In particular, she found the Quêto/Nagô domination of Candomblé inspiring as both an example of African cultural survival in the Americas and a real-world matriarchy honored by time and tradition—hence the book’s title. Her research embarrassed Euro-Brazilian nationalists for two reasons: First, it publicized Brazil’s blackness. Second, in order to prove the antiquity of this matriarchy, she revealed the open secret that male priests were widely believed to be homosexuals.

As a student of the cultural relativist Franz Boas, Landes studied Afro-Brazilian religion as a rich transnational legacy, not a racial embarrassment. Even more important for Landes, it was an inspiration for women’s equality elsewhere in the world. Her book ends like this: “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?’”²

Though she knew Brazil to be a sexist country, Landes seemed to find evidence of a “cult matriarchate” in which women ruled in the religious

affairs, the most important affairs, of blacks in the Brazilian state of Bahia.³ But she tampered with the evidence and assumed her audience was far enough away not to notice. She had invoked the male priests’ reputation for homosexuality in order to establish that the male presence was a recent pathology rather than a contradiction to Landes’s own construction of Candomblé tradition. Mark Alan Healey would later call her portrait of ancient matriarchy a primitivist cliché.⁴ Perhaps wishful thinking encouraged her to write, “I know by now that women are [in Bahia] the chosen sex. . . . I take it for granted just as I know in our world that men are the chosen sex.”⁵ Like Margaret Mead, Landes had silenced or distorted the evidence.⁶ For example, she dismissed the significant number of men leading Candomblé temples during her visit as violating “African tradition,” allegedly suffering from psychological problems, and admissible only because of the ritual laxity of the women.

Candomblé is divided into various nations, or denominations, which reflect what worshipers regard as the African origin of each nation’s ritual protocols. Besides the Yoruba-related Nagô nation (called Quêto today), there were also, in Landes’s day, the Fon-inspired Jeje nation, the Angola nation, and the expanding clergy that worships the Brazilian Indian, or *caboclo*, spirits. Landes joined the line of scholars who privileged the Quêto/Nagô nation for its alleged African purity and authenticity.

Landes associated the “laxity” of the priestesses who admitted men with a variant of the Nagô religion in which the *caboclo* spirit predominated. But given the fact that a priestess of the Nagô nation is credited with having founded the *caboclo* cult,⁷ that the Nagô *orixás* remained preeminent even in the *caboclo*-worshipping houses,⁸ and that virtually every Nagô temple also worshiped *caboclos*,⁹ the line that Landes drew between the female-dominated Nagô temples and the male-dominated *caboclo* temples does not hold, as temple leaders make evident in their declarations about practices.¹⁰

In fact, male leadership is an old phenomenon in all nations that practice Candomblé. Throughout the nineteenth century, men outnumbered women generally in the Bahian priesthood, and they were common even in the supposedly all-female priesthood of the Nagô and Jeje nations. It was the increase in *female* leadership that was news for the cult.¹¹ Kim Butler believes that a tradition of exclusively female temple leadership began in the Casa Branca, or the Ile Iya Naso, temple, in the mid-nineteenth century (rela-

tively late in the documented history of the Jeje and Nagô in Brazil) and spread with the growing prestige of that temple among scholars and elite sponsors.¹² Yet even here the evidence—statistically or in principle—of an exclusively female leadership is ambiguous before the 1930s.

In the 1930s, male priests still significantly outnumbered females.¹³ Nonetheless, since the publication of Landes's work,¹⁴ the scholarly advocates of Jeje and Nagô superiority have come to speak with one voice on the matter, agreeing that for the priesthood, "women are the chosen sex." Fortunately for students of Candomblé, Landes and her companion Édison Carneiro recorded, albeit dismissively, copious evidence against their own interpretation. Yet Landes's conclusions clearly changed the minds and conduct of Candomblé's leading bourgeois advocates, and, consequently, they changed the conditions of the religion's reproduction in Brazilian society.

Grounds for Dismissal: The Nation-State vs. the Ade

In the just cause of women's liberation, Landes played with the facts and constructed a unique status for women. Yet her erasure of the historically male majority in the Candomblé priesthood played into the cause of male-centered nationalism because, as George Mosse shows, it depends on homophobia.¹⁵ Landes's appeal to a counterfactual nostalgia, equally typical of nationalisms, dismissed the male presence in Candomblé as a recent corruption. As if to confirm the nonnormative character of male possession priests, Landes reported the widespread view that they were all *adés*, "passive homosexuals" in Landes's medico-pathological terms. Making no reference to indigenous discourse, Landes diagnosed these men as diseased and thereby alienated from any legitimate *cultural* tradition, though she reports that their sexual orientation did not bother other priests or adherents.¹⁶ As priests, Landes observed, *adés* were "supported and even adored by those normal men of whom they were before the butt and object of derision."¹⁷

Landes's revelation of these sexual matters discomfited her Brazilian colleagues, even those who welcomed her work on the demographic and cultural importance of Afro-Brazilians. These scholars were more sensitive to international standards of national respectability, more concerned to guard Brazil's open secrets, than were the priests and subjects of trans-Atlantic

sacred nations. The state functionary and culture-broker Arthur Ramos flatly denied Landes's claims about a "cult matriarchate" and about a significant homosexual presence. In retaliation, he cooperated with Herskovits in foreclosing future professional opportunities for Landes. She later blamed her professional undoing on Ramos's anger over her outing homosexuality in Brazil.¹⁸

Édison Carneiro, the journalist who became Landes's guide in Bahia, published *Candomblés da Bahia* (1948) after her two books had come out in 1940 and 1947. During their acquaintance, Landes apparently changed Carneiro's mind, or at least his public posture. Whereas in the late 1930s she had quoted Carneiro's words of admiration for the beauty of the male homosexual priests and the liveliness of *caboclo*-worship, Carneiro's own subsequent publications were frankly hostile.¹⁹ By 1948, he was denouncing the male priesthood:

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 *caboclos* are almost all improvised, self-made, "learning one song here and another song there," as the Nagô and Jeje leaders say.²⁰

Fully aware that male chief priests outnumbered their female counterparts in the 1930s, Carneiro attempted to rescue the reputation of the *authentic* Candomblé with an unsubstantiated claim that the Candomblé priesthood of all nations had once been exclusively female. Following Landes, he now dismissed the male priesthood as a recent deviation. Carneiro added that they belonged to what he considered the least representative and respectable of Candomblé nations—the Angola, Congo, and Caboclo nations. Like Landes (esp. 1940), he went on to argue that almost all male priests were uninitiated charlatans, 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 contorted argument was scorned in efforts to construct a legitimate tradition. Male chief priests were said not to

believe in the evil magic they allegedly practiced, while female chief priests were credited with rather naïve faith in the innocent magic they practiced.²¹

Carneiro had a special stake in dignifying the West African Nagô and Jeje nations. He was a mulatto himself and belonged to a school of Northeastern Regionalist writers who sought to rescue the Northeast from its reputation of inferiority on account of its black and mulatto majority. At the turn of the century, Brazilian officials inspired by eugenics had invested enormous resources in recruiting European immigrants to whiten the population of the southeastern state of São Paulo, which had industrialized with the profits of initially slave-based plantations. Advocates of the relatively underdeveloped Northeast argued that, although their region was poorer and blacker, its blacks and mulattoes were superior (on account of their disproportionately West African Nagô and Jeje origins) to those of the Southeast (whose origins were mainly West-Central African—for example, Congo and Angola).²² Thus, nostalgia for the Jeje-Nagô-centered, allegedly matriarchal, and innocent prehistory of Candomblé came to unite the spokespersons of two imagined communities: the northeastern regionalist Carneiro and the transnational feminist Landes.

In the cultural logic of the nation-state, Michael Herzfeld describes a “structural nostalgia,” or “the longing for an age before the state, for the primordial and self-regulating birthright that the state continually invokes.”²³ Such invocations of the nation-state are regularly fictional and apologetic. I am suggesting that similar forms of nostalgia are invoked by the leaders of alternative, non-state-based communities with the intent to naturalize their authority along with the conventions, boundaries, and hierarchies that keep them in power. Such naturalizations rest similarly upon highly selective and sentimentalized constructions of the past.

Carneiro, however, remains more ambiguous and ambivalent than Landes. If he reproduces the ideology of primordial female leadership in Afro-Bahian religion, his familiarity with the material makes him unable to ignore the facts supporting other constructions of tradition. For example, he details evidence of male leadership at the heart of the reputedly most traditional and orthodox lineage of Nagô temples—the line of Casa Branca. He credits the nineteenth-century African-born male priest Bamboxê (Bamgbose) with initiating Aninha, a member of Casa Branca and the future chief priestess of the Opo Afonja temple. Aninha’s disappointment that another man, Joaquim

Vieira, did not succeed the recently deceased chief priestess of Casa Branca is adduced as the reason for Aninha’s secession from that temple and for her efforts to found the Opo Afonja temple. Even though the histories recounted nowadays at Opo Afonja leave little doubt that Aninha founded the house as its first chief priest, Carneiro reports that the male priest Joaquim had been that temple’s first chief.²⁴ He is among numerous male priests of the Jeje and Nagô nations whom Carneiro mentions as eminences during his time.²⁵ They defy his own post-Landean synopsis of the tradition.

In sum, Landes and Carneiro shared a dirty secret. Yet a comparison of Carneiro’s early remarks to Landes suggests that Candomblé’s “passives” were neither dirty nor secret before 1938. The *adés* became a subject of tabu amid the conflict between the North American feminist and the Brazilian academic gatekeeper Arthur Ramos. Faced with the powerful international gaze, Ramos simply denied the embarrassing reality and, with the help of Herskovits, defamed Landes. A close observer of Bahia and a close friend of Landes, Carneiro could hardly deny the homosexuality, but he did try to mitigate its relevance to the local tradition.

The Mãe Preta and the Mãe-de-Santo:

The Candomblé Priestess in the Nationalist Narrative

Light-colored Bahian elites have tried to downplay local homosexuality to save face in the eyes of richer regions of Brazil and of more “advanced” nations. The efforts have almost certainly been among the motives behind Brazilian scholars’ disproportionate attention to female-headed Candomblé temples. The Northeastern Regionalists therefore shared with Landes a desire to dignify Candomblé’s female leadership. Once an embarrassment to the bourgeois nation-state, the priestess eventually attained a pride of place in Northeastern Regionalism and its close ally, Brazilian nationalism. She gained ground from her superficial likeness to the Mammy (*Mãe Preta*, literally “Black Mother”) that, a few years earlier, had become an object of nostalgic adulation in Gilberto Freyre’s influential narrative of *mestiço* nationalism, *The Masters and the Slaves* (1933).²⁶ Freyre had sought to demonstrate that the slave plantations of his native Northeast were sites of such sensual interaction between white men and their black nursemaids, pals, and

mistresses that Brazil evaded the kind of racial purism and segregation that created the infamy of U.S. racism and German Nazism.

Hence, far from being a land of racial inferiority, as Brazilians feared they were seen from the outside, the country was a paragon of racial and cultural hybridity, or *mestiçagem*, and of “racial democracy,” or interracial equality and conviviality. Variants of this historical and cultural revisionism were common in Latin America and the Caribbean in the 1930s. Neither in Freyre’s narrative nor in the popular cultural images that multiplied in its wake did the implicit logic of racial and sexual inequality disappear—it was simply surrounded by a halo of nostalgic innocence, in which the dignity of the Black Mother is guaranteed by her personal relations with the lord of the manor. Today’s journalistic descriptions of Candomblé’s black priestess seem similarly tinged with nostalgia for this innocent past, in which the Black Mother is gentle and generous to her white children, but also stern enough to control her black children.²⁷ These are the terms of her ongoing incorporation into the narrative of *mestiço* nationalism, and they appear to explain to a large extent why, since the 1960s, the city government of Salvador, the Bahian state, the Brazilian federal state, businesses, and the national media outlets have lent disproportionate moral support and funding to the female-headed temples.

Some female-headed temples have certainly benefited, but most Afro-Brazilian women get little from their inclusion in the Freyrean romance. In 1980, for example, the average white woman earned 69 percent of the average white man’s salary, while the average black man (*preto*) earned only 63 percent, the average black woman (*preta*) only 38 percent, and the average mulatto woman (*parda*) only 36 percent of the average white man’s earnings. Any casual visitor to Brazil notes immediately that black and mulatto women are cruelly overrepresented among domestic servants, accounting for over 80 percent in a society that is only 45 percent black and mulatto.²⁸ Despite the omnipresent public affirmation in Brazil of the Freyrean nonracist vision of the country, 60 percent of black and mulatto men surveyed say that whites are racist; black and mulatto women are even *more* likely (69 percent) to say so.²⁹ Thus, the available statistics offer 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* generally over Afro-Brazilian men.³⁰ My intention is not to minimize the accomplishments of Candomblé’s

priestesses since the nineteenth century (their triumphs over racism and sexism have been impressive), but to underline precisely the historicity of a constructed tradition that has served several recent ideologies. The conditions of the female triumph in the Candomblé priesthood have been recent in genesis, unique in the Yoruba-Atlantic world, and explicable only in terms of an ongoing transnational cultural politics.

Priestesses have always been important leaders in Candomblé, in its West African antecedents and its contemporary Yoruba counterparts. But I have argued that the current *preeminence* of priestesses results from a convergence between nationalist and transnational forces. These forces have created a few irresistible opportunities since the 1930s for an otherwise underprivileged class of people. Since the 1930s, a few priestesses have acquired mighty advocates in the overlapping imagined communities of the Brazilian nation and transnational feminism. To the same degree, all the male priests of the Candomblé have acquired a powerful set of enemies.

Priestesses, Too, Question the Matriarchate

Notwithstanding the harmony of black female religious authority with white sentimentality about the Black Mother and with the Ur-matriarchy imagined by some transnational feminists, leading priestesses talk about gender and authority in ways that complicate any description of Candomblé as matriarchal. Mãe Stella and other mothers of the great so-called traditional temples *do* tend to avow publicly that women possess a special acumen for priestly duties, such as culinary artistry and the capacity for motherly warmth (*aconchego*) as well as a unique legitimacy to rule. But the gender of sacred agency often contrasts with the priestesses’ personal sexual identity. For example, in response to one of the numerous journalists seeking an explanation for “the cult matriarchate,” Mãe Stella of the prestigious Opo Afonja temple made it clear that, for her, for her predecessor Mãe Senhora, and in the “African tradition,” the consummately macho god Xangô has always been the real boss (*chefe*).³¹ The late Mãe Nicinha of the preeminent Jeje temple, Bogum, explained, “In our nation, the only person who can occupy this post [chief priest] is a woman who has a male saint [that is, who is consecrated to and possessed by a male god].”³²

Leão Teixeira argues that the very image of divine authority in the Candomblé is masculine.³³ Thus, in a further example, the sequence in which the gods are saluted during sacred festivals implies an association between maleness and superior rank among the gods. Older or male gods tend to be saluted earlier in the liturgical song sequence, or *xiré*, while younger and female gods tend to be saluted later. The unique ritual prerogatives of men, the servility expected of the daughters of goddesses, and the restrictions placed on menstruating women and on the daughters of goddesses all suggest that priestly ritual competency and leadership themselves are also coded male.³⁴ In indigenous terms, Candomblé hardly invites description as a cult matriarchate.

The Cultural Logic of Passivity

Years ago, I publicly proposed an explanation for the locally perceived normalcy of “passive homosexuals,” or *adés*, as possession priests and therefore as the heads of Candomblé temples. The debate it engendered demonstrates that, like regionalist, nationalist, and international feminist communities, the African diaspora is also constituted by certain open secrets and can be reconstituted by rerelections and rereadings of what secrets need to be defended.

There are no reliable statistics on how many Candomblé priests engage in what Landes called “passive homosexuality.” Thus my thesis did not concern their actual numbers. Rather, I asked 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 the alleged prominence of *adés* among possession priests. In order to understand them, one must grasp where they fit in a set of semantic contrasts in Brazilian gender categories. English-speaking North Americans tend to distinguish sharply between those men who engage in sex with other men (homosexuals) and those who don’t (heterosexuals). But Brazilians are far more likely to distinguish men who penetrate others during sexual intercourse (*homens*, or “[real] men”) from those who are penetrated (*bichas*, *vidas*, or, in Candomblé language, *adés*).³⁵ They share this pattern of classification with many peoples around the Mediterranean, as well as much of premodern Europe, precolonial Na-

tive America, and most of the rest of the world.³⁶ Modern European and Anglo-American prison populations and sailors seem no exception. The contrast between penetrators and penetrated is not the only idiom of sexual classification in Brazil, particularly in recent decades.³⁷ However, this particular difference remains central to most working-class Brazilians’ vocabulary of social classification and to men’s and boy’s daily negotiation of respect. Even when the Bahians I know use the term *homosexual*, most mean only the party who is habitually penetrated, or passive. Of course, the real behavior of both *homens* and *bichas*, or *adés*, is usually more varied than one word will allow, and the normative assumption that the sexually “active” party is dominant outside of bed is not necessarily true.³⁸ However, local *ideological* assumptions and expectations tend to link habitual male passivity with transvestism, feminine gestures, feminine occupations, and the social subordination of the penetrated party.

So why do many Brazilians think there is a connection between the possession priesthood and men who love men?³⁹ Peter Fry suggests that the shared classification of male passives and possession cults as deviant makes the priesthood an appropriate niche for homosexuals. Following Victor Turner and Mary Douglas, Fry argues that the homosexuals’ *liminal* status in Brazilian national society suits them symbolically; in the Brazilian popular imagination, to professions dealing with “magical power.”⁴⁰ Délcio Monteiro de Lima moves in the direction of acknowledging what is normal about homosexuality in Candomblé ideology: both Afro-Brazilian religions and Brazilian Kardécist Spiritism, he argues, have shown themselves more generally tolerant than the Roman Catholic Church.⁴¹ More to the point, Patricia Birman reports that men whose heads are governed by female divinities—like Langã, Oxum, and so forth—are expected to share in the female dispositions and desires of the goddesses.⁴² Thus, according to Candomblé’s indigenous personality theory, the homosexuality of male priests is in their natures (*natureza*), is derived from nature (*natureza*), and is authorized by the sacred—hence their attraction to and social acceptance in Candomblé.

Fry also notes the advantageous flexibility enjoyed by *bichas*, or passives, in the performance of social roles normally reserved, in the wider society, primarily for one sex or the other. That is, they can acceptably do the cooking and embroidering necessary for the temple and yet, in a similar religion in Belém do Pará (where Fry conducted his research), retain the social advan-

tages 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.”⁴³ In the Bahian case, men’s advantages over the great Nagô mothers in this regard are not so evident. What is more evident, and is observed by Leão Teixeira, is that homosexual men bring to the Candomblé three other advantages over women: (1) higher average earnings; (2) 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) immunity from restrictions on menstruating women, such as exclusion from shrine rooms.⁴⁴ A woman consecrated to a male god is eligible to receive a further initiation (*maô de faca*) that entitles her to sacrifice birds, but, while menstruating, she cannot even do that.⁴⁵

The cult matriarchy, then, is not a fact given simply by tradition, but a plausible interested and contested *construction* of tradition based on a cosmopolitan repertoire of precedents and interpretive logics. And despite the pronounced homophobia of many contemporary third world bourgeois nationalists (including a number of prominent Anglophone African elites), one would be hard-pressed to locate the precolonial, traditional Yorùba precedents for the homophobia that Landes, Ribeiro, and Roger Bastide have presented as psychoanalytic proof of male priests’ inferiority and as defiance of African tradition. The homophobia that denormalizes the prominence of *adés* in the Candomblé priesthood has its roots in a nationalism and a transnational feminism of the mid-twentieth century.

The proliferation of latter-day explanations of the prominence of *adés* in the Brazilian Candomblé (not to mention the Cuban Ocha priesthoods) and the well-documented history of Candomblé adherents’ comfort with *adés* in this role appear to have a common root. That root is evident between the lines of Landes’s informants’ testimony in the 1930s and most clearly implied by my comparative field research between Brazilian Candomblé and what most adherents regard as its West African homeland.

James H. Sweet is one scholar who argues that transvestites, including homosexual transvestites, were once common in southern and West Central Africa and that some of these homosexual transvestites were important ritual experts.⁴⁶ They 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’s argument inverts the third world nationalist diagnosis that homosexuality is a white man’s disease. Instead, the lapse of homosexuality and transvestism among West Central African male ritual experts in the postcolonial period is blamed on Western missionary and colonial influence.

Having no knowledge of these traditions, Carneiro had argued that male priests, who he assumed were passive homosexuals, were virtually restricted to the West Central, African-identified Angola and Congo nations and to the worshipers of the *caboclo* Indian spirits.⁴⁷ He did not suggest that male priests were any less vile for participating in such alternative traditions; rather, he emphasized their nonconformity to the uniquely African and uniquely dignified standard of the West African-inspired Jeje and Nagô nations. The sixteenth- and seventeenth-century records analyzed by Sweet leave unexplained the cultural logic by which West Central Africans and their descendants believed ritual expertise to be connected to transvestism and homosexuality and the degree to which practitioners believed the connection to be a strong or necessary one. Historical and ethnographic records from the twentieth century have, however, left evidence of a strong connection precisely in the trans-Atlantic nations connecting the Brazilian Nagô to the Nigerian Yorùba and the Brazilian Jejes to the Ewe, Gen, Aja, and Fon peoples of West Africa. Today at least, the shared West African Yorùba, West African Fon, and Brazilian Candomblé imagery of marriage to the divinity, who episodically displaces his bride’s personality and consciousness, is in fact foreign to West Central African religions (Wyatt MacGaffey, p.c., 8 August 1906). But in Landes’s and Carneiro’s research, all of the nations of Brazilian Candomblé appeared to share this West African imagery.

Mounted Men: What Nigerian Male *Elegun* and New World

Passive Priests Do and Don’t Have in Common⁴⁸

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

group. In West Africa, Oyo-Yoruba worshipers employ multiple metaphors to evoke people's relationships with the gods. Like Brazilian *candomblésistas*, Oyo-Yoruba worshipers of the *orisa* gods might call any devotee of a god the child (*omo* [Yoruba], *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 Yoruba priest of, say, Sango might be addressed as *Baba Onisango* ("Father Owner-of-Sango"); a senior priestess would be addressed as *Iya Onisango* ("Mother Owner-of-Sango"). In Brazil, the male head of a Candomblé temple is called a *pai-de-santo* ("father-in-divinity"), while a chief priestess is called a *mãe-de-santo* ("mother-of-divinity").

Yet the Yoruba terms that mark out the priest's competency to embody the god through possession-trance and to act as his or her worldly delegate rely, above all, upon allied metaphors of marriage and sexuality. According to Carneiro, as we shall see, 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* worshipers these metaphors are now dead or dying. Yet, the death of a metaphor seldom means that it has lost its effectiveness in communicative acts: instead, it has often become naturalized, implicit, and pervasive. In present-day Brazilian Candomblé, metaphors of marriage and sexuality stand powerfully alongside metaphors of parenthood and birth in the often-contested representation of tradition and reproduction of the priesthood.

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

The overlapping implications of West African Ewe-Gen-Aja-Fon (E.G.A.F.) vocabulary of spirit possession have faded a bit more since the eighteenth-

century era when these captives predominated in the slave trade to Bahia. Also in that West African cultural zone, which believers regard as the homeland of the Afro-Brazilian Jeje nation, most possession priests are women, but there are also numerous men. As in Yorubaland, male and female possession priests are generically called wives (*si* in Fon) of their divinities. However, chief priests in the E.G.A.F. region are called mothers (*mo*) of the god, regardless of their sex. This latter term is foreign to both Yorubaland and Brazil.

For months after initiation, male and female novices among the Oyo-Yoruba wear women's clothes: *iro* (wrap skirts), *buba* (blouses), and *oja* (baby-carrying slings); on ceremonial occasions, they also wear *tiro* (antimony eyeliner), *laali* (henna for the hands and feet), delicate bracelets, earrings, and so forth. As mature priests, or *elegun*, women and men braid their hair and follow the latest styles in women's coiffures, but on ceremonial occasions they also continue to don *tiro* eyeliner, henna, and delicate jewelry. Many uninitiated Yoruba women do these things, but male possession priests are virtually the only men who do so. In the Oyo-Yoruba town where I conducted my principal West African field research, both the strip-weaving 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 anglo possession priests.

Yet the most pervasive and dramatic gendered symbol in the representation of the priests' symbolic role—from the initiation onward—is the complex web of metaphors implicit in the verb *gun*, meaning "to mount." The very term for possession priest (*élegun*) means "the mounted one." It refers to what a rider does when astride a horse (hence, possession priests are sometimes called horses of the gods [*éin oria*]). The term *gun* also refers to what an animal or a brutal man does sexually to his female partner (and possession by Sango is often spoken of as a brutal act).⁴⁹ The term *gun* also refers to what a god, especially Sango, does to his possession priests. And Sango's is the most influential possession priesthood not only on the Bight of Benin but, to an even greater extent, among the *orixá* worshipers of Brazil, Cuba, Trinidad, and the United States.⁵⁰ However one translates the verb *gun* into English, the term *montar* in Caribbean Spanish and Brazilian Portuguese and the Haitian Kweyòl term *monte* (all cognates of the English verb

“to mount”) encode the same three referents and have a long history of usage by worshippers in Cuba, Brazil, and Haiti.

Carneiro illustrates how Afro-Latin Americans, such as the priests and cognoscenti of the Bahian Candomblé, still consciously construed these West African Yoruba metaphors in the 1930s:

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 numerisms of the women*. . . . Sometimes *they are much better-looking than the women*.⁵¹

This language is largely consistent with the West African, Oyo-Yoruba symbolism of spirit possession I observed among Nigerian Sango priests of both sexes in the 1980s, but for one detail: the reluctance of “real men” to be possessed in the Brazilian Candomblé. Sex was not an infrequent topic of conversation among male friends of my age group in Igboho, and the Sango priests in the town were vocal and ribald in their humor about the matter. Yet I never became aware of any commonly used vocabulary in Oyo-Yoruba language to distinguish upright men from a category of men who are homosexual or somehow like women. I have never heard any West African *orisha* priest speak of himself or his fellow priests as anything like a homosexual or as engaging in same-sex intercourse. I argue simply that 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. The metaphor-ridden “loophole” by which Carneiro and his priestly friends understood men to have recently entered the Yoruba/Queto/Nagô possession priesthood in the 1930s was virtually identical—in both its terms and its emphases—to the hegemonic logic of the Oyo-Yoruba Sango priesthood that I observed in the 1980s and that others had observed in that West African priesthood since the nineteenth century.⁵²

Controversy and the New African Diaspora

Dozens of Yoruba scholars have written cogently about gender and gender relations in Yoruba religion and culture generally.⁵³ Their work acquires new dimensions with the increase in the numbers of Yoruba scholars in the diaspora and in interactions 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 Yoruba scholars and African-American priestesses of Yoruba religion in the United States.

One Yoruba scholar in the United States, the sociologist Oyeronke Oyewumi, read my argument and then published an accusation: I had described the West African possession priests as “drag queens” and “actual if not symbolic homosexuals.”⁵⁴ The purpose of this denunciation was to affirm the author's argument that there is no gender in authentic Yoruba culture. Like Freyre, Oyewumi attempts to turn the tables on North American and West European cultural and racial chauvinism by arguing the superiority of her own allegedly nondiscriminatory culture.

In evidence, the author cites the extensive gender coding of pronouns, names, kinship terms, and occupational terms in English, in contrast to the numerous Yoruba pronouns, kinship terms, and occupational terms that, in her opinion, do not encode gender—terms such as *oun* (“s/he”), *omo* (“child”), *egbon* (“senior sibling or cousin”), and *oba* (“monarch”). Although gender concepts and gender inequality are important elements of contemporary Yoruba society, Oyewumi argues that these terms evince a time before the slave trade or before colonialism when Yoruba culture had no gender at all. Thus, in its essence, even today's Yoruba culture is gender-free. Oyewumi must then explain away the gender coding that actually does appear in much well-established Yoruba terminology and social practice. There are clearly words in Yoruba for “male” (*akó*), “female” (*abó*), “man” (*alémirin*), and “woman” (*abimrin*). The terms of address and reference for parents, senior relatives, senior strangers, and people of almost every occupation indicate the referent's gender—for example, *Baba* (“father,” “senior male,” or, rarely, “senior patrilineal relative”), *Iya* (“mother,” “senior female,” or, rarely, “senior matrilineal relative”), *Baba Ayo* (the tekonymic “Father of Ayo”), *Baba Eleran* (“male butcher”), and *Iya Alaso* (“female clothier”). In Yoruba

society, practitioners of most professions have long been vastly more of one sex than the other: for example, virtually all social clubs (*egbe*) are segregated according to sex, and certain religious and political titles are strongly gender marked, despite their infrequent adoption by a person of the other sex, such as *babalawo* (a type of divination priest [lit., "senior-male-who-owns-the-mystery"]), *baalé* (nonroyal quarter or town chief [lit., "father of the land"]), *iyale* (eldest wife of the house [lit., "mother of the house"]), and *baalé* (head of residential compound [lit., "father of the house"]). The 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.

How Nationalist Scholars Shape "Folk" Culture

Since Gilberto Freyre organized the First Afro-Brazilian Congress in 1934, dozens of such conferences have brought together priests and scholars to rethink and reorganize *orisa* religion and to reflect on its significance for the imagined communities of the region, the nation, and the African diaspora. Several of these conferences have had momentous effects. For example, the congress organized by Edison Carneiro in Bahia in 1937 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 Marta 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 *orisa* religion from Brazil, Cuba, Puerto Rico, Trinidad, the United States, and Nigeria. A dozen such conferences have followed, albeit under an increasingly factionalized leadership. As the leader of one series of conferences, Abimbola has, in the opinion of some groups, become the leader of the global *orisa*-worshipping community.

It is against this backdrop that events at a conference at Florida International University in 1999 acquire their significance. Titled "Orisa Devotion as a World Religion: The Globalization of Yoruba Religious Culture," the conference brought together dozens of U.S.-based Nigerian, Cuban, Puerto Rican, native North American, and Brazilian scholars with priests of

equally diverse geographical and national origins. Despite its logical and empirical errors, Oyewumi's argument received a standing ovation from two Trinidadian priestesses and an African-American priestess. The nostalgic reconstruction of an ideal Yoruba past and essence appealed both to New World priestesses who would resist the sexism of U.S. society (including its local forms of *orisa* worship) and to diasporic Yoruba people offended by North American disregard for Africa and its cultures. The African-American priestess who applauded told me years later that she appreciated Oyewumi's assertiveness. Supportive senior Yoruba scholars added even more examples of gender neutrality, such as the Yoruba practice of calling one's paternal relatives of either sex *baba* (normally meaning "father" or "senior man") and maternal relatives of either sex *iya* (normally meaning "mother" or "senior woman") in certain contexts.

Other scholars in attendance restricted their comments to private conversations. One Yoruba professor of philosophy was first taken with the gender-free argument but then reconsidered 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 in which she automatically becomes junior to everyone else in the house. There, she will always be expected to defer to those male and female-in-laws born before her marriage and to the earlier-married wives. Another Yoruba scholar told me that Oyewumi's argument was not significant enough to challenge.

Oyewumi's *Invention of Women* was awarded the Distinguished Book Award of 1998 by the Sex and Gender Section of the American Sociological Association (Judith Howard [selection committee member], p.c., 19 November 2001). Africanists, much less Yorubanists, were not consulted. Thus, a new structural nostalgia has reunited transnational feminism with nationalism, just as such movements combined in the 1930s and 1940s to cover up the "scandal" of *adé* priests of the Candomblé. The alliance is new in some details but remains logically similar to the union of Brazilian Regionalism and nationalism with Landes's transnational feminism. It is not clear how fast, how commonly, or how deeply this new alliance of ideological forces will affect the practice of *orisa* worship, but every subsequent conference of scholars and priests is likely to add authority to these motivated representations of the shared past.

Notes

1. The term "imagined communities" alludes to Anderson's thesis that monolingual vernacular print capitalism allowed the citizens of the nation-state to "imagine" sharing the same communal experience as fellow citizens whom they might never have met (Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities*, rev. ed. [1983; London and New York: Verso, 1991]). However, I broaden Anderson's reference by suggesting that nation-states are not the only communities so united by machine-reproduced texts and that the rituals shared by dispersed populations (including those recommended by texts that are distributed fast or over long distances) also enable powerful "imaginings" of communally shared experience among unacquainted parties.
2. Ruth Landes, *The City of Women* (New York: Macmillan, 1947), 248.
3. Ruth Landes, "A Cult Matriarchy and Male Homosexuality," *Journal of Abnormal and Social Psychology* 35 (1940): 386–97.
4. Mark Alan Healey, "The Sweet Matriarchy of Bahia": Ruth Landes' Ethnography of Race and Gender," *Dispositio / n* 23, no. 50: 87–116.
5. Landes, *City of Women*, 202.
6. On Mead, see Derek Freeman, *Margaret Mead and Samoa: The Making and Unmaking of an Anthropological Myth* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1983).
7. Landes, "A Cult Matriarchy and Male Homosexuality," 391.
8. *Ibid.*, 391–92.
9. Édisson Carneiro, *Candomblés da Bahia*, 7th ed. (1948; repr. Rio de Janeiro: Civilização Brasileira, 1986), 54.
10. Compare Landes, "A Cult Matriarchy and Male Homosexuality," 393, with Carneiro, *Candomblés da Bahia*, 52.
11. See esp. Rachel E. Harding, *A Refuge in Thunder: Candomblé and Alternative Spaces of Blackness* (Bloomington: University of Indiana Press, 2000), 71–74, 77, 103; Carneiro, *Candomblés da Bahia*, 57, 104–9; Kim D. Butler, *Freelands Given: Freedoms Won: Afro-Brazilians in Post-Abolition São Paulo and Salvador* (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 1998), 193, 195; Fayette Wimberly, "The Expansion of Afro-Bahian Religious Practices in Nineteenth-Century Cachoeira," in *Afro-Brazilian Culture and Politics: Bahia, 1790s to 1990s*, ed. Hendrik Kraay, 74–89 (Armonk, N.Y.: M. E. Sharpe, 1998), 82–85.
12. Butler, *Freelands Given, Freedoms Won*, 193–209; Butler, p.c., 12/3/02.
13. Mariza Corrêa, "O Mistério dos Orixás e das Bonecas: Raca e Gênero na Antropologia Brasileira," *Etnográfica* 4, no. 2 (2000): 245; Carneiro, *Candomblés da Bahia*, 104.

14. Landes, *The City of Women*; Landes, "A Cult Matriarchy and Male Homosexuality."

15. George Mosse, *Nationalism and Sexuality* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1985).

16. Corrêa, "O Mistério dos Orixás e das Bonecas," 246–48, esp. 246nn24, 25; Healey, "The Sweet Matriarchy of Bahia," 88. See also Roger Bastide, *O Candomblé da Bahia* (São Paulo: Editora Nacional, 1961), 309; René Ribeiro, "Personality and the Psychosexual Adjustment of Afro-Brazilian Cult Members," *Journal de la Société des Américanistes* 58 (1966): 122.

17. Landes, *The City of Women*, 37; Landes, "A Cult Matriarchy and Male Homosexuality," 393.

18. Indeed, Landes's "A Cult Matriarchy and Male Homosexuality" not only asserts the numerical importance of "passive homosexuals" in the Candomblé, but also identifies a dozen such men by name and describes them in the most demeaning terms possible. However, Ramos's offense did not seem to derive from her violation of these men's privacy and good name.

19. For Carneiro's admiring quotes, see Landes, *The City of Women*, 37. Also see quote below.

20. Carneiro, *Candomblés da Bahia*, 104–5.

21. *Ibid.*, 103–9.

22. J. Lorand Matory, "The English Professors of Brazil: On the Diasporic Roots of the Yoruba Nation," *Comparative Studies in Society and History* 41, no. 1 (1999): 72–103; and J. Lorand Matory, *Afro-Atlantic Religion: Tradition, Transnationalism and Matriarchy in the Afro-Brazilian Candomblé* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, forthcoming).

23. Michael Herzfeld, *Cultural Intimacy: The Social Poetics of the Nation-State* (New York: Routledge, 1997), 22.

24. Carneiro, *Candomblés da Bahia*, 57; also Butler, *Freelands Given, Freedoms Won*, 195.

25. Carneiro, *Candomblés da Bahia*, 119–23.

26. Gilberto Freyre, *The Masters and the Slaves*, trans. Samuel Putnam (1933; repr. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1986).

27. See also Leni M. Silverstein, "Mãe de Todo Mundo: Modos de Sobrevivência nas Comunidades de Candomblé da Bahia," *Religião e Sociedade* 4 (1979): 143–69; Matory, *Afro-Atlantic Religion*.

28. Agentes de Pastoral Negros, *Mulher Negra: Resistência e Soberania de uma Raza* (Petrópolis: Vozes and Quilombo Central—Agentes de Pastoral Negros, 1990), 26, based on the Brazilian Census of 1980 [IBGE].

29. Paul Singer, "Radiografia da 'Democracia Racial' Brasileira," in *Racismo cotidiano, A mais completa análise sobre o preconceito de cor no Brasil*, ed. Cleusa Turra and Gustavo Venturi (São Paulo: Editora Ática S. A., 1995), 70.
30. Ruth Landes, "Negro Slavery and Female Status," *Mémoires de l'Institut Français d'Afrique Noire* 27 (1953): 265–68.
31. See Hamilton Vieira, "A história do Axé Opô Afonjá na homenagem a Mãe Stella," *A Tarde*, 14 September 1989, 20 Caderno (Pasta 324, AT archives); "Mãe Stella: Se nós não preservamos a natureza viva, termina tudo," *A Tarde*, 30 April 1995, 20 Caderno, p. 1, Recorte de Jornais, Bahiatursa office, Salvador.
32. "Cirrum' começou no Bogum e 'Gamô' e' a nova yalorixá," *A Tarde*, 30 December 1975, 3.
33. Maria Lina Leão Teixeira, "Lorogun—Identidades sexuais e poder no candomblé," in *Candomblé: Desvendando Identidades*, ed. Carlos Eugênio Marcondes de Moura (São Paulo: EMMW Editores, 1987), 33–52.
34. *Ibid.*, 43–44, 48.
35. Peter Fry, "Male Homosexuality and Spirit Possession in Brazil," *Journal of Homosexuality* 11, no. 3–4 (1986): 137–53.
36. Richard C. Trexler, *Sex and Conquest: Gendered Violence, Political Order, and the European Conquest of the Americas* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1995).
37. See, e.g., Peter A. Jackson, "Reading Rio from Bangkok: A Southeast Asianist Perspective on Brazil's Male Homosexual Cultures" (review article), *American Ethnologist* 27, no. 4 (2000): 950–60; Don Kulick, *Travesti: Sex, Gender and Culture among Brazilian Transgendered Prostitutes* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1998); Richard G. Parker, *Beneath the Equator: Cultures of Desire, Male Homosexuality, and Emerging Gay Communities in Brazil* (New York: Routledge, 1998); James N. Green, *Beyond Carnival: Male Homosexuality in Twentieth-Century Brazil* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1999).
38. See, for example, Kulick, *Travesti*.
39. Many Cuban and Puerto Rican adherents of similar traditions think so too. A category of men known as *maricas* or *Addodis* has for decades been identified as common in the Yoruba-affiliated denomination of Afro-Cuban religion called Regla de Ocha or Lucumí. They are said to be protected by the goddesses Yemayá and Ochún, who love them dearly. See Lydia Cabrera, *El Monte* (1954; repr. Miami: Colección del Chichereki, 1983), 56; Rómulo Lachatañeré, *El Sistema Religioso de los Afrocubanos* (1939; repr. Havana: Editorial de Ciencias Sociales, 1992), 223–24. The earlier of these written accounts dates from the same period as Landes's observations about homosexuals in the Brazilian Candomblé, the late 1930s.
40. Fry, "Male Homosexuality and Spirit Possession in Brazil," 138; Victor

- Turner, *The Ritual Process* (Chicago: Aldine, 1969); Mary Douglas, *Purity and Danger* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1966). It must be acknowledged that Fry's analysis is far removed from the psychological framework and pathologizing conclusions of Landes, Carneiro, and their successors Barstle (e.g., 1961:309) and Ribeiro (1969:109–20). Fry's is a symbolic analysis of local images of "magical power" and the role of *inversion* within them. I remain concerned, however, that all of the analyses focusing on the abnormality or invertedness of Afro-Brazilian cultural phenomena implicitly use Eurocentric readings of *Carnaval* as the model of all Afro-Brazilian culture. Despite the best of 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 abandon. Indeed, the Europeanist model of even the *Carnaval* as social inversion has limited applicability to the Brazilian case—*pace*, for example, Victor Turner, "Carnival in Rio: Dionysian Drama in an Industrializing Society," in *The Celebration of Society: Perspectives on Contemporary Cultural Performance*, ed. Frank Manning, 103–24 (Bowling Green, Ohio: Bowling Green University; London, Canada: Congress of Social and Humanistic Studies, University of Western Ontario, 1983).
41. Délcio Monteiro de Lima, *Os Homossexuais* (Rio de Janeiro: F. Alves, 1983), 167ff.
42. Patricia Birman, "Identidade social e homossexualismo no Candomblé," *Religião e Sociedade* 12, no. 1 (1985): 2–21; also Leão Teixeira, "Lorogun—Identidades sexuais e poder no candomblé," 48, and Landes, "A Cult Matriarchate and Male Homosexuality," 395. A number of sex-changing, or ambisexual, divinities—like Logunedé and Oxumaré—are also said to inspire and legitimize their male worshippers' men's same-sex desires. 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 an initiate by placing a certain leaf under his or her sleeping mat in the initiation room.
43. Fry, "Male Homosexuality and Spirit Possession in Brazil," 147–49.
44. As Andrews shows, men of any given social race earn more on average than the women of that social race (George Reid Andrews, "Racial Inequality in Brazil and the United States: A Statistical Comparison," *Journal of Social History* 26 [1992]: 252). It has also been observed that, in contexts in which 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 (*Veja*, 12 May 1993, 52–59). For an explanation of the term “social race,” which I use in the absence of an alternative generic term for the Brazilian color and status categories, see Charles Wagley, “Introduction,” in *Race and Class in Rural Brazil*, ed. Charles Wagley, 14 (1952; repr. New York: UNESCO/International Documents Service, Columbia University Press, 1963); Carl N. Degler, *Neither Black Nor White: Slavery and Race Relations in Brazil and the United States* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1971), 105.

45. Leão Teixeira, “Lorogun—Identidades sexuais e poder no candomblé,” 44–45; see also Maria Stela de Azevedo Santos, *Meu Tempo É Agora* (São Paulo: Editora Oduwuwa, 1993), 52–54, on the servile status of women consecrated to female *orixás*.

46. James H. Sweet, “Male Homosexuality and Spiritism in the African Diaspora: The Legacies of a Link,” *Journal of the History of Sexuality* 7, no. 21 (1996): 184–202.

47. Carneiro, *Candomblés da Bahia*, 265.

48. I have previously presented the main body of this argument in J. Lorand Matony, *Sex and the Empire That Is No More: Gender and the Politics of Metaphor in Oyo Yorùbá Religion* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1994); “Sex and the Empire That Is No More” (Ph.D. diss., University of Chicago, 1991); and “Homens montados: Homossexualidade e simbolismo da possessão nas religiões afro-brasileiras,” in *Escravidão e Invenção da Liberdade*, ed. João José Reis, 215–31 (São Paulo: Brasiliense, 1988).

49. In a probative contrast, the term *múgùn* (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.

50. Duly warned by my colleague Wande Abimbola, I acknowledge that the English gloss “to climb” better captures the fact that many *orisa* (though not Sango) are regarded as rising from the ground rather than descending from above (Wande Abimbola, *Iya Will Mend Our Broken World: Thoughts on Yorùbá Religion and Culture in Africa and the Diaspora [Interviews with an introduction by Teor Miller]* [Roxbury, Mass.: Aim Books, 1997], 152–54). But this gloss fails to encode the equestrian and sexual implications implicit in the terms *esin* (“horse”), *iyambo* (“bride” or “wife”), and *gun*. It also unintentionally deemphasizes the fact that the divine agent is understood to end up *on top*—that is, in a position symbolizing his or her control over the priestly medium. The main virtue of the gloss “to climb” is not its greater semantic precision as a translation but in its sublimation of the equestrian and sexual implications of the folk terminology, which might otherwise 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, a widely traveled *babalawo* diviner, spokesperson of the priesthood at its Ife heartland, and university professor. Rather, it is to examine both the historical roots of cultural reinterpretations like his own and the cosmopolitan cultural politics that shape them.

51. Landes, *The City of Women*, 37.

52. Matony, *Sex and the Empire That Is No More*, 171. This priestly cross-dressing has been documented at least since 1910, and there is no reason to believe that it was new at that time.

53. E.g., Rowland Abiodun, “Women in Yorùbá Religious Images,” *African Languages and Cultures* 2, no. 1 (1989): 1–18; Bolante Awe, “The Iyalode in the Traditional Yorùbá Political System,” in *Sexual Stratification*, ed. Alice Schlegel, 144–60 (New York: Columbia University Press, 1997); N.A. Fadipe, *The Sociology of the Yorùbá* (1939; repr. Ibadan, Nigeria: Ibadan University Press, 1970); O. O. Okediji and F. O. Okediji, “Marital Stability and Social Structure in an African City,” *Nigerian Journal of Economic and Social Studies* 8, no. 1 (1966): 151–63; Molara Ogundipe-Leslie, “Women in Nigeria,” in *Women in Nigeria Today*, ed. S. Bappa, J. Ibrahim, A. M. Imam, F. J. A. Kamara, H. Mahdi, M. A. Modibbo, A. S. Mohammed, H. Mohammed, A. R. Mustapha, N. Perchonock, and R. I. Pitin, 119–31 (London: Zed Books, 1985); etc. Consider also the important work of the non-Yorùbá scholars Niara Sudarkasa (*Where Women Work* [Ann Arbor: University of Michigan, 1973]), and Judith Hoch-Smith (“Radical Yorùbá Female Sexuality,” in *Women in Ritual and Symbolic Roles*, ed. Judith Hoch-Smith and Anita Spring [New York: Plenum, 1978]). All of these scholars have made the reasonable point that Yorùbá gender arrangements differ from Western ones, without reaching Oyewumi’s extreme conclusion that Yorùbá culture is without gender.

54. Oyeronke Oyewumi, *The Invention of Women: Making an African Sense of Western Gender Discourses* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1997), 117.