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The English Professors of Brazil: On the Diasporic Roots of the Yorùbá Nation

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Melville J. Herskovits (e.g., 1966, 1941) argued that African Americans in virtually every American nation “retained” some greater or lesser cultural “memory” of the African past. Assuming that the cultures of the West African Fon, Yorùbá, and Ashanti (as reconstructed in the “ethnographic present”) represented the extant “base line,” or starting point, of African-American cultural history, Herskovits’ “ethnohistorical” method posited that less-acculturated African-American groups instantiated the earlier historical stages of the more acculturated African-American groups. Thus, for example, spirit possession in the Brazilian Candomblé, could be taken to demonstrate the African derivation of “shouting,” or the behavior of those “filled with the Holy Spirit,” in black North American churches (Herskovits 1958[1941]:220–1). No less, the Candomblé, could be taken to represent an earlier stage of black North Americans’ gradual syncretic adaptation, accommodation, and acculturation (Herskovits 1958[1941]:218).¹ Dozens of scholars have usefully employed similar methods in the study of African cultural “memory” and adaptations.² This study revises Herskovits’ cultural history of the African diaspora and proposes, at the Afro-Latin American locus classicus of Herskovitsian studies, some non-linear alternatives to Herskovits’ and others’ visions of diasporas generally.

The Jeje-Nagô, or Fon- and Yorùbá-affiliated temples of the Brazilian Candomblé religion are a locus classicus in the study of memory, retention, and

This essay has benefited greatly from the suggestions of numerous colleagues, informants, and archivists. Space will not allow me to mention all of them, but J. D. Y Peel, Paul Lola Bamgbose-Martins, and Bernard Favier deserve special mention. The primary field research for this project was undertaken with the support of the Social Science Research Council, while archival research was primarily supported by the National Endowment for the Humanities.

¹ Herskovits’ descriptions tend to represent the distinctive qualities of African-American cultures, in terms of enduring “deep-seated drives,” “bents,” and “underlying patterns.” On the other hand, Herskovits gives little attention to proximate historical and sociological mechanisms of their transmission.

² E.g., Arthur Ramos, Edison Carneiro, Ruth Landes, and Roger Bastide on Afro-Brazilians; Lydia Cabrera on Afro-Cubans; Herskovits himself on Haitians and Surinam Maroons; Gonzalo Aguirre Beltrán on Afro-Mexicans; W. E. B. Du Bois, Joseph Holloway, Sterling Stuckey, Albert Raboteau, Robert Farris Thompson and Margaret Creel on blacks in the United States; and so forth.

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continuity as the mechanisms of community formation and cultural transmission in the African diaspora. They are cited more often and with greater certainty than any other African-American institution as proof that African culture has “survived” in the Americas (see, for example, Raboteau 1980[1978]; Bastide 1971; Herskovits 1966:227). The formal and lexical parallels between the Jeje-Nagô Candomblé, and the contemporary religions of the West African Fon and Yorùbá are indeed impressive, as trans-Atlantic researchers M.J. Herskovits, Roger Bastide, Pierre Verger, Mikelle Smith Omari, Robert Farris Thompson, Margaret Drewal, Deoscóredes and Juana Elbein dos Santos, and I have agreed.

One of the sharpest implicit challenges to the Herskovitsian project has come from a leading figure in cultural studies. Although Paul Gilroy’s *The Black Atlantic* (1993) borrows extensively from the anthropological and Herskovitsian lexicon (using terms as syncretism, creolisation, ethnohistory, and even black Atlantic itself), Gilroy overlooks these debts and appears to dismiss the question of the diaspora’s cultural and historical connection to Africa as “essentialist.” Instead, Gilroy describes the African diaspora primarily in terms of what he calls “discontinuous” cultural exchange among diverse African-diaspora populations. Drawing examples primarily from the English-speaking black populations of England, the United States, and the Caribbean, Gilroy’s *The Black Atlantic* (1993) argues that the shared cultural features of African diaspora groups generally result far less from shared cultural memories of Africa than from these groups’ mutually influential but culturally neutral responses to their exclusion from the benefits of the Enlightenment legacy of national citizenship and political equality in the West.

Gilroy usefully gives new salience to the role of free black Atlantic travelers and of cultural exchanges among freed or free black populations in creating a shared black Atlantic culture and shared black identities that transcend territorial boundaries. This approach is foreshadowed in Brazilianists’ study of the ongoing, two-way travel and commerce between Brazil and Africa.³ Yet the Brazilianists who briefly attend to the cultural consequences of that travel and

³ E.g., Rodrigues (1935[1896]), Rio (1976[1906]:19–20), Pierson (1942:237–51, 272), L. Turner (1942), Olinto (1980[1964]), Karasch (1987:194, 322), J. H. Rodrigues (1965), Bastide (1978[1960], 1971), Verger (1976[1968]), J. M. Turner (1975[1974]), Manuela Carneiro da Cunha (1985). See Sarracino (1988) and Cabrera (1974:27; 1983:405–6) on the lesser-known exchanges between Cuba and West Africa. See Métraux (1972[1959]:360) on Haitian King Christophe’s little-known recruitment of 4,000 free Dahomeans into the police force of post-revolutionary Haiti, a population movement that may have brought cultural influences to Haiti as well. One is tempted to seek in this unusual immigration part of the reason for the prominence of Dahomean culture in Haiti despite the fact that Dahomeans had been vastly outnumbered by other Africans in the eighteenth-century slave population. See Carr (1989[1955]:especially 2–3) and Mintz and Price (1992[1976]:56) on the settlement of over 15,000 free Africans into the British West Indies and the extraordinary religious legacy of one vodun priest among them. See Bolster (1997), Linebaugh and Rediker (1990, cited in Gilroy 1993:226n22), and Gilroy (1993:12ff) on the influential character of black sailors’ mobility generally.

commerce on Brazil have tended to assume their preservative or restorative effects on the memory of an unchanging African past, rather than their transformative effects on both Brazil and Africa (see Rodrigues 1935[1896]:169; Bastide 1978:165, 1971:130; Elbein dos Santos and Santos 1981:159).⁴

The case to be discussed in this essay—that is, the historical connections between Africa and what is often described as the most “purely African” religion in the Americas—will demand a reunion of these models of the African diaspora. It suggests that greater space be given to African agency (which is neglected in Herskovits’ and Gilroy’s models) and to African cultural history (which is neglected in Gilroy’s alone). Both African agency and African culture have been important in the making of African diaspora culture, but, more surprisingly, the African diaspora has at times played a critical role in the making of its own alleged African “base line” as well.⁵

The following revision of diasporic cultural history is based on the premise that Africa is historically “coeval” (Fabian 1983) with the American cultures of which Herskovitsians and their allies describe it as the “past,” the “base line,” the “provenience,” the “origin” and the prototype. The further premise of this revision is closer to the original sense in which Fabian employed this term. The West Africanist ethnographers and folklorists whom African-Americanists have tended to cite for information on the “African origins” of New-World practices are no more external to the politics of statecraft and knowledge in colonial Africa than are African-Americanists from the racial politics of the post-slavery Americas. Not only traveling black pilgrims, businesspeople, and writers but traveling white anthropologists, folklorists, and photographers, as well as their publications, have long been vehicles of transformative knowledge in the production of what Thompson (1983) and Gilroy (1993) call the “black Atlantic” culture.⁶

I will argue that, aside from the introduction of the “culture” concept (made famous by Franz Boas and the likes of his student, Melville J. Herskovits), the greatest impulse behind the respectful study of African culture in the Americas occurred at the hands of Africans or, properly speaking, through a dialogue among West Africans and African-American returnees to colonial Lagos, now in Nigeria. I will argue that, to this day, neither African-American lifeways nor the scholarly discussion of them escapes the influence of the Lagosian cultural renaissance of the 1890s. Yet few scholars are aware of its fundamental influence. Various literatures have masked its principles as characteristics of a pri-

⁴ In a rare exception, Ramos wrote that missionary-taught literacy among the West African Yoruba after the mid-nineteenth century might account partly for the rise of Nagô as a lingua franca in Bahia (1942:20). Kubik (1979) and Côrtes de Oliveira (1992) also discuss the role of the slave trade itself in generating the ethnic groupings known as nations in black Brazil.

⁵ Blier (1988) and Yai (1992), for example, offer glimpses of how the Atlantic dialogue has shaped aspects of Dahomean culture that Herskovits mistook for primordial.

⁶ For similar conceptualizations of the dialogic unity among the cultures of the Atlantic perimeter, see also Curtin et al. (1978:215), Thornton (1992), and Roach (1996).

mordial African culture, taken them for granted as natural dimensions of cultural memory, or mistaken them for the arbitrary preferences of Euro-American scholars.

THE BLACK ATLANTIC NATIONS: EXPLAINING
THE SUCCESS OF THE YORÙBÁ

The Atlantic perimeter hosts a range of groups profoundly influenced by western African conceptions of personhood and of the divine. Their religions include Candomblé, Umbanda, Xangô, and Batuque in Brazil, as well as “Santería,” or Ocha, and Palo Mayombe in Cuba and in all the American countries where Cubans and Caribbean Latino music have traveled. These are religions of spirit possession, divination, and healing that also define peoplehoods called “nations,” which link them with specific places in Africa. For example, there is a nation avowing Yorùbá origins called “Lucumí” in Cuba, “Nagô” or “Quêto” in Brazil, and “Nago” in Haiti. There is a nation avowing links to the Ewe- and Fon-speakers called “Arará” in Cuba, “Jeje” or “Minas” in Brazil, and “Rada” in Haiti. And then there is the Congo, or Congo/Angola, nation found in Cuba, Brazil and Haiti.⁷ In the Americas, well into the late nineteenth century, such black Atlantic nations have brought their citizens together as work crews, man-mission societies, Catholic lay brotherhoods, and rebel armies. Today, they are held together—often with tremendous success—by obedience to shared gods, shared ritual standards, shared language, and, in some sense, a shared leadership.

Since the nineteenth century, one such Afro-Latin nation has risen above all the rest—preeminent in size, wealth, grandeur, and international prestige. It is studied, written about, and imitated far more than any other, not only by believers but by anthropologists, art historians, novelists, and literary critics. The origin and homeland of this trans-Atlantic nation is usually identified as Yorùbáland, which is now divided between southwestern Nigeria and the People’s Republic of Benin on the Gulf of Benin.⁸ Though the equivalence among, for example, the Cuban Lucumí, the Brazilian Nago, the Haitian Nagô, the French West African Nagot, and the British West African Yorùbá was not fully evident in their names, late-nineteenth- and early-twentieth-century ethnogra-

⁷ Though, in the past, “nation” referred to a group of slaves and freed people sharing approximately the same African origin, the meaning of the term has diversified across the twentieth-century contexts of its use. In Brazil, a temple and its members typically belong to a particular nation, though some temples profess hybrid nationality. Each nation may include a different modality of the same god. For example, Sobô is said to be the Jeje version of the Nagô god Xangô. Similarly, in Cuba, each nation is a separate denomination, and each nation may include a different modality of the same god. For example, Sarabanda is said to be the Congo form of the Lucumí god Oggún. In Haiti, on the other hand, each god belongs to one or another nation, and the same god may have different versions in different nations. However, any given temple is not said to belong to one nation or another. Finally, in all three countries, most nations are assumed to have their headquarters and origins in some eponymous African place.

⁸ The Reverend Samuel Johnson, writing during the period presently under discussion, was among those to refer to the West African Yorùbá as a nation (1921[1897]), as do contemporary Yoruba na-

phers clearly assumed that unity in a way that I will argue was consistent with the interests of a powerful class of black “ethnicity entrepreneurs” (see, for example, Ortiz 1973[1906]:28; 32–33; Rodrigues 1945[1905]:175, 1935[1896]:24; Ellis 1970[1890]:29–30).⁹

The dominant narration of African religious history in the Americas comes down to us through Melville J. Herskovits and his legion of followers. It is the story of slaves and of their descendants, who—separated by time, distance and cruel fate from Africa—heroically remember and preserve their ancient ancestral culture. Among the most successful were slaves in Bahia, Brazil, and their descendants, who, in the late twentieth century, practice what partisan observers call “purely African” rituals and sing in what such observers call “perfect Yoruba.” According to this narration of history, the descendants of the Yorùbá—members of the “Nagô,” or “Quêto,” nation—were so successful at preserving their primordial heritage that certain “houses,” or temples, call themselves “purely African” or “purely Nagô.”

The apparently extraordinary success of the Brazilian Nagô nation at preserving its African religion is paralleled by the success of the cognate Lucumí nation in Cuba (see, for example, Ortiz 1973[1906]:28) and by the success of the Fon-inspired Rada and Mina-Jeje nations in Trinidad (Carr 1989), Haiti (such as Price-Mars 1990[1928]), and São Luis, Brazil (Ferretti 1985). Scholars have conventionally explained the success of the Brazilian Nagô nation in terms of an interaction among multiple factors. However, many of the factors cited rely for their explanatory value on the imputation of general causal mechanisms, nomothetic principles, or inductive patterns that, I will argue, are not borne out by the comparative literature and are not subject to any consensus among the various authors.

Authors have credited Yorùbá/Nagô success to various factors. First, the Brazilian scholar, Raymundo Nina Rodrigues and his followers offered the principal explanation that, at the time of the slave trade, the West African “Nagôs” had possessed a more organized priesthood and a more highly evolved and therefore more complex mythology than had the other equally numerous African peoples taken to Brazil. In Rodrigues’ opinion, the Jejes, or Fon, ran a close second in evolutionary complexity (see Rodrigues 1945[1905]:342, 1988 [1905]:230–1).¹⁰

On the contrary, Robert Farris Thompson and Bunseki Fu-Kiau’s discussions of Kongo cosmology suggest that what has come to be called Yorùbá religion possessed no monopoly on complexity (see Thompson 1983:101–59). In any case, it is not obvious that more complex religions are more attractive to converts than are less complex religions. Christianity did not replace Greco-

tionalists resisting Hausa-Fulani hegemony in successive Nigerian military governments. The usual term for nation in Yùraba is *orílẹ̀dè*, which defines peoplehood in terms of shared land and language.

⁹ Kasinitz coined the term “ethnicity entrepreneurs” to describe those who construct and mobilize ethnic identities in the strategic pursuit of collective or individual interests (1992:195ff).

¹⁰ Secondly, argued Rodrigues, the widespread usage Nagô language had enhanced the spread of Nagô religion.

Roman religion because of Christianity's relative mythic complexity or the superior organization of its priesthood. Nor would such an explanation account for the spread of Buddhism and Islam. Whether simpler or more complex than Yorùbá culture, the Central, East, and southern African cultures of the Bantu-speakers, including the BaKongo, are the products of a demographic and cultural expansion within Africa that dwarfs the trans-oceanic influence of the Yorùbá. By the eighth century A.D., the Bantu languages had spread from a small nucleus in what is now Nigeria to Zanzibar, off the coast of East Africa (Curtin et al. 1978:25–30). Bantu-speakers now dominate virtually the entire southern half of the African continent and have significantly influenced the music, religion and language of the Americas as well (see Kubik 1979; Vass 1979).

Verger spearheaded a less popular, non-evolutionary explanation for Nagô success, attributing the strength of Yorùbá influence to "the recent and massive arrival of this people" in Bahia and to the presence of numerous Yorùbá captives "originating from a high social class, as well as priests conscious of the value of their institutions and firmly attached to the precepts of their religion" (Verger 1976:1). A related demographic explanation for the spread of Nagô religion is that the arrival of the Brazilian Nagôs' ancestors in Brazil was concentrated in the nineteenth century, at the last stage of the slave trade, making them the most recent and therefore least acculturated of major African ethnic groups in Brazil. They also immigrated in huge numbers. However, studies of other African-American cultures have indicated the disproportionate influence not of the immigrant groups who were the last to arrive but those who had arrived the earliest (see Mintz and Price 1992[1976]:48–50; Creel 1988; Hall 1995[1992]; Aguirre Beltrán 1989a, 1989b). Moreover, the long-developing preeminence of Yorùbá/Nagô divinities in the Center-South of Brazil (Rio and São Paulo) did not depend on Nagô numerical dominance there.¹¹ Though the Nagô nation is the most prestigious and imitated in the Center-South, its African ancestors had never predominated among the Africans enslaved there. Likewise, Dahomean divinities and terms prevail in Haitian religion despite the fact that Dahomeans were always a minority among Haitian slaves. Thus, students of the diaspora disagree sharply over the causal relationship between the numerical population and cultural predominance among African-American groups.¹²

● Even where the Nagôs did predominate numerically, being the most common has never guaranteed that a particular sub-culture would become as prestigious

¹¹ See João do Rio (1976[1906]) for early references and Prandi (1991:108–9) on the recent acceleration of the Yorubanizing trend in the Brazilian Center-South.

¹² On the one hand, Herskovits assumes that the predominance of any given African culture in the Americas has resulted from the numerical predominance of its bearers among the captives brought to its American host region (1958[1941]:52). On the other hand, Bastide writes point-blank: "In any given area there is a dominant African culture; *but the predominance of that culture (whichever it may be) bears no direct relation to the preponderance of such-and-such an ethnic group in the slave-shipments to the area concerned* (1971:11, emphasis in original).

as has Nagô religion. In fact, being common is precisely what excludes many practices from the canon of elite culture in societies around the globe.

Other demographic factors might have contributed to the success of Nagô religion in Bahia. In nineteenth-century Bahia the Nagôs were disproportionately represented among urban slaves and among *negros de ganho*, that is, the slaves who freely moved about contracting work for themselves in order, then, to supply their masters with some agreed-upon portion of their income. Their freedom of movement also allowed a certain freedom to organize themselves and to commemorate their ancestral practices beyond the supervision of their masters.¹³ It should be noted, however, that these explanations appear to contradict the overall pattern of explanation dominant in the pan-American literature. The Brazilian Nagô case defies the usual view in the Afro-Americanist literature that rural isolation and poverty are the normal conditions for the "retention" of African culture.¹⁴

Such contradictions may have contributed to the endurance of Rodrigues' evolutionary explanation. Rodrigues' sense that social and biological "evolution" had made the pre-slave trade Nagôs superior and thereby allowed their Brazilian descendants to preserve and diffuse their religion and identity was credible to generations of ethnographers in Rodrigues' entourage, including Arthur Ramos, Edison Carneiro, Ruth Landes and Roger Bastide, as well as the laypeople who still unwittingly quote them.¹⁵

Advocates of a third and more recent model expressly deny the explanatory relevance of African cultural history and of the ethnic demographics of Brazilian slavery. Instead, they argue that the pride of place given to the Nagô nation and the notion of its "purity" are the products of arbitrary, local invention by whites since the 1930s. To the now-conventional claims of Nagô purity and superiority, an army of anti-essentialist and social constructionist critics (Motta, Henfrey, Dantas, Fry, Frigerio, Brown and Bick, Wafer and Santana) has replied, "Nonsense!" These religions are "purely Brazilian," if they are anything pure at all; and they owe nothing to Africa worth mentioning. Indeed, the prestige attached to the claim of "Nagô purity" is that culturally or racially European scholars consented to protect from the police only those houses that em-

¹³ In what they describe as the exceptional cases of Trinidadian and Cuban religion, Mintz and Price (1992[1976]:60) attribute the strength of "continuities" from Africa to the combination of the recentness of the immigration and the immigrants' immediate or quickly ensuing freedom.

¹⁴ See, for example, Creel (1988), Levine (1977), Bastide (1971[1967]:213–22), Georgia Writers' Project (1940), Ramos (1942, 1940[1934]), and the numerous studies of maroon societies. In regard to the association of African "survivals" with rural isolation, Bastide (1983:242–3) describes Bahia as exceptional, being a large city that retained its African religion with relative purity. By the same logic, Herskovits (1968[1941]:115–6, 120, 124) recognizes Paramaribo, Port-au-Prince and Bahia as all similarly exceptional, and Puckett (1969[1926]:10–11) represents New Orleans as exceptional. With so many exceptions, these American urban settings with highly African-inspired cultures cases would better be regarded as disproof of any simple rule.

¹⁵ Rodrigues' opinion also seems to have influenced the famous Cuban folklorist Fernando Ortiz (e.g., Ortiz 1973[1906]:28).

braced the scholars' definition of Africanness, which included a disavowal of "black magic." The added consequences of this "invention of Africa" and factitious "Africanization" of the Candomblé, the argument goes, were that it unfairly devalued allegedly less pure Afro-Brazilian religious practices and that it persuaded Afro-Brazilians to content themselves with the rights of citizenship only in some imaginary, otherworldly Africa.

This new social constructionist ethnography is persuasive to many right-minded critics of Brazil, where the state now publicly endorses certain Afro-Brazilian religions and performing arts while colluding in the racist exclusion of blacks from political and economic power. The social constructionists have wrongly posited, however, that this scenario depends on the powerlessness of all blacks over every part of their lives. A more carefully drawn history will, in my opinion, reveal the role of Afro-Brazilians in creating a trans-Atlantic culture, with consequences no less revolutionary in Africa than in Brazil.

VECTORS OF "AFRICAN PURITY": THE ENGLISH PROFESSORS OF BRAZIL

Let us consider, first, one of the more surprising distinctions of the people who were calling themselves Yorùbá in late nineteenth- and early twentieth-century Bahia. Indeed, some of these were also the informants who convinced the early ethnographers of Yorùbá-Nagô superiority and created the image of that nation's extraordinary survival and traditionalism. Many of the towering leaders and perennial informants quoted in the literature on Afro-Bahians from the 1890s to the 1940s were famous for their Anglicized names, English-language competency, or Anglo-Saxon social connections. Their contemporaries identified them, with no intentional irony, both as outstanding priests or exemplars of a "purely Yorùbá" tradition and as "professors of English."

The first was Martiniano Eliseu do Bonfim, born on October 16, 1859 to freed African parents in Bahia. In 1875, his father took him to be educated in Lagos, West Africa, where he remained for eleven years. During that time, he once visited his parents in Bahia, and his father once visited him. In Lagos, he attended the Faji School, a Presbyterian school, where all of his teachers were Anglophone Africans. Though he never traveled inland, he drank deeply from the emergent Lagosian literature on Yorùbá traditional religion and underwent initiation as a *babaláwo*, or Ifá diviner, in Lagos between 1875 and 1886. His contemporary in the 1930s and 1940s, the Bahian journalist Edison Carneiro, reported that Martiniano not only was fluent in Yorùbá but had visited England and taught English to financially comfortable blacks in Bahia (Carneiro 1986[1948]:120; also L. Turner 1942; Frazier 1942; Braga 1995:37–55).

The last of the Afro-Bahian *babaláwos* was Felisberto Sowzer, who, like some other Brazilian returnees to Lagos, had Anglicized his Portuguese surname, Souza. His descendants tell me that he took pride in being "English,"

since Lagos was a British colony at the time, and that, in Brazil, he valued the distinction of being able to speak English. Carneiro reports that Felisberto also spoke fluent English and Yorùbá (Carneiro 1986[1948]:120).¹⁶

Like many Lagosian and Bahian male elites of his day, he was a Freemason.¹⁷ Indeed, the first Masonic lodge in Lagos was established in 1868 in the city's Brazilian Quarter. According to Ayandele, that lodge comprised "nearly all the African leaders" of Lagos (Ayandele 1966:268). Felisberto proudly displayed the Masonic sign of his elite, trans-Atlantic affiliations alongside his Englishness and his skills as an Ifá diviner. The side of his house in Bahia bore a seal featuring an Ifá divining board, the Masonic compass, the Yorùbá proverb, *Suru ni oogun aiye* (meaning, patience is the medicine of life), and two biblical inscriptions in English ("The Lord is my Helper" and "Wait on the Lord and keep his way") (see Pierson 1942:259). Indeed, Sowzer is part of an impressive dynasty of Brazilian-Lagosian travelers and priests, beginning with his diviner grandfather from Ọyó, Manoel Rodolfo Bamgbose, and ending with numerous priestly grandchildren in Lagos, Bahia and Rio.¹⁸

Perhaps the only trans-Atlantic dynasty more famous than the line of Bamgbose is the Alakija family. Though they are not noted for any particular connection to the Candomblé religion, they are a central feature of latter-day memories about the relation between Bahia and the Africa from which Candomblé is said to have originated. Thus, it is telling that, according to his descendants in Bahia, the last president of the Reformed Ogboni Fraternity (which was founded in the 1930s as a nativist reaction to bourgeois Africans' exclusion

¹⁶ Consider also the life of Isadora Maria Hamus Ramos, who was born in Cachoeira, Bahia, in 1888. When six years of age, she went to Lagos with a relative and remained there for eight years, learning Yorùbá and English. In the early 1940s, she was a businesswoman and Candomblé priestess in the town of São Felix, Bahia (Lorenzo Turner 1942:64).

¹⁷ To this day, the signs of Freemasonry are actively employed by practitioners of Haitian Vodou, Cuban Palo Mayombe, and Nigerian òrìṣà-worship (Matory forthcoming).

¹⁸ Other important priestly travelers between West Africa and Brazil have been Otampê Ojarô, founder of the Candomblé of Alaketu (Costa Lima 1977:26–28); Marcos Pimentel, a nineteenth-century chief priest of the Terreiro de Mocambo on the island of Itaparica (Elbein dos Santos and Santos 1981:159–60); and, most importantly, Iyá Nasô, founder of Casa Branca, whose mother secured her own manumission in Bahia and returned to Africa to enter the priesthood. The daughter was born in Africa but voluntarily moved to Bahia to found this first of the three most famous Candomblé temples in Brazil. Her successor, Marcelina, is said to have gone from Africa to Bahia voluntarily and returned to Africa for an extended sojourn before returning finally to Bahia to assume the leadership of the Casa Branca Temple (Bastide 1978[1960]:165). Verger reports that it was Marcelina who first brought to Bahia the famous Bamgbose—priest, grandfather of Felisberto Sowzer, and great-great-grandfather of Aizinho of Oxaguiã, chief of the prestigious Pilão de Prata Temple in Bahia (Verger 1980).

Similarly, in Cuba, the famous African-born Adechina is said to have been enslaved in Cuba but to have returned to Africa for initiation as a babaláwo, or Ifá diviner, later returning to Cuba (Brown 1989, II:94; Cabrera 1974:27). Cuban oral history also identifies a free-born African woman named Efunche (also Efunsetan or La Funche), who traveled as a free person to Cuba and there reformed Afro-Cuban religion in the nineteenth century (David H. Brown, personal communication, July 1995).

from some white Masonic lodges) was Adeyemo Alakija.¹⁹ During his research in Bahia in the mid-1930s, Donald Pierson was shown a copy of the *Nigerian Daily Times* of December 1932. One of its articles detailed the professional accomplishments of the Alakija family, which included a lawyer, an otolaryngologist, and a civil engineer. Throughout the generations of their twentieth-century residence in Bahia, the Brazilian branch of the family has borne English names like George and Maxwell (Pierson 1942:243).

The defensive pride the African-Bahian travelers and their children took in the Africa they knew is summed up in one remark recorded by Pierson:

These people here in Bahia think Africans are all barbarous and uncivilized. They won't believe we write our language and that books are printed in it. . . . They don't know that in Lagos there are good schools, better than they've got in Bahia. Look at this [showing a photograph of a school in Lagos]! Is there anything in Bahia as fine as that? (Pierson 1942:272).

This is a genre of recollection of Africa prominent in Bahia during the first half of this century. These memories are not the pristine African or Yorùbá culture that the victims of American slavery remembered well enough to retain and preserve. No, these memories are based upon the experiences, souvenirs, and photographs of a class of literate and well-traveled Africans who, I will argue, helped to bring "Yorùbá culture" and "Yorùbá traditional religion" as such into existence, established their prestige around the Atlantic basin, and canonized them as the preeminent classical standard of African culture in the New World.

From the mid-nineteenth century onward, what many Bahians remembered first-hand (or heard about from those who did) was a nineteenth- and twentieth-century West African coast in which English language, Roman script, Masonic temples, and a lively press were the stuff of daily life. Their dialogue with early Bahian ethnographer Raymundo Nina Rodrigues produced images of a cosmopolitan but, to their minds, still "purely African" culture. It was these images that prompted my own archival and oral historical search in 1995–96. Whatever Africanness and purity might have meant to these African-Brazilian travelers and their descendants, it was surely not invented by the Euro-Brazilian researchers who interviewed them and later advocated their cause.

In truth, we are now closer to understanding the cultural hybridity of the African-Brazilians who propagated Yorùbá culture in Bahia during the late nineteenth and the early twentieth centuries. But we have yet to see how Afro-Brazilian talk and action helped to generate a so-called Yorùbá culture in West Africa that is in fact younger than its Brazilian diaspora. Whence derives the presumed unity of this culture? Whence derives the ideology of Yorùbá supe-

¹⁹ During the Nigerian struggle for independence in the 1940s and 1950s, Adeyemo Alakija played a leading role in the Yorùbá nationalist organization, *Egbẹ̀ Ọmọ̀ Odùduwà*, founded by Obafemi Awolowo.

rriority to other African cultures and its persuasiveness to so many New-World blacks, browns, and whites?

Thus comes the final question: If Euro-Brazilian scholars are not the source of the idea, whence comes the extreme value placed upon cultural and, at times, racial purity in the Brazilian Nagô nation? The Afro-Brazilian nation identified with the Yorùbá exists in a twentieth-century Brazil dominated by the public valorization of cultural and racial hybridity, and the Brazilian Nagô nation claims descent from a West African religion that, by all evidence, has also long valued cultural borrowing and hybridity (Matory 1994b). Neither of the scholarly histories conventionally given for the emergence of the Candomblé—either as the recollection of an ancient African religion or as the invention of the Euro-Brazilian bourgeoisie—would seem to predict the value placed upon racial and cultural purity around the mid-twentieth-century Candomblé. Where did that value come from?

“THE COAST”: ON THE TRANSNATIONAL GENESIS OF THE YORUBÁ

Brazilians have long called western Africa “the Coast” (*a Costa*), *pars pro toto*, and identified it as the classical origin of the finest in Afro-Brazilian culture. Indeed, the region of western Africa most frequented and occupied by Afro-Brazilian returnees was and is the West African seaboard between Freetown and Lagos. Elements of the regional society that emerged there in the nineteenth century had been preceded among inland political formations, cultural centers, and trade routes. For example, the Kingdom of Ifẹ was much admired as a spiritual and cultural capital by various peoples beyond its small domain, including the Benin people to the east and Aja-Fon-speakers to the west. The Kingdom of Òyó spread its influence through conquest, government, and trade. However, as a political and cultural identity uniting Ifẹ, Òyó, and other groups, Yorùbá-ness was created in the Creole society of the Coast, in a place and in a time that put it in constant dialogue with the nations of the Afro-Latin diaspora.

By the late eighteenth century, the Òyó Kingdom, whose population the Hausa called *Yaràba* (Clapperton 1829:4; also Law 1977:5; Awde 1996:14), had by fits and starts secured control over between a third and a half of what is now called Yorubaland. The Òyó Empire hosted a large and prosperous savannah population, which mediated between the trans-Saharan trade to the north and the trans-Atlantic trade to the south. The trade in Òyó hand-woven strip cloth across a wide belt of the West African interior is evidence of the extensive lateral projection of Òyó cultural values as well (Aderibigbe 1975). Those kingdoms that Òyó came to dominate militarily also came, in various degrees, to speak dialects highly similar to that of the Òyó and to practice forms of worship deeply indebted to Òyó ritual and mythology. With the fall of the Òyó Empire around 1830, Òyó-ethnic military leaders in Ìbàdàn came to rule an even larger territory than the antecedent royal empire, and, throughout Ìbàdàn’s

sphere of influence, Òyó gods became potent sources of symbolic power (see, for example, Apter 1992:36; 51).

With its eighteenth-century capital and heartland over 300 miles from the Atlantic coast, the Òyó empire was not naturally pre-destined to supply the defining cultural emblems of the Coastal society. In fact, the Kingdom of Benin was once and might have remained the culturally and politically sovereign power in the coastal city of Lagos. Until the 1790s, Lagos had been but a minor, outlying town in the sprawling Benin Empire.²⁰ Well into the nineteenth century, Lagos was so firmly under Benin influence and so peripheral to Òyó imperialism that it had not been Yorùbá in the original, Hausa sense of that term nor, as we shall see, in the modern sense that would later be introduced by Sàró and Afro-Latin returnees.

From the last quarter of the eighteenth century until the middle of the nineteenth, the decline of the Òyó Empire and the rise of the Dahomean kingdom coincided to produce a tide of captives from Òyó, Ègbá, Ègbádò, Ilèsà, and nearby regions of what would become Yorubaland, including a small western group called the Nàgò, or Ànàgò, which, being especially vulnerable to Dahomean predations, gave its name to the emergent Afro-Brazilian nation. They were captured and forced aboard ships at the coastal ports of Lagos, Badagry, Porto-Novo, and Ouidah. Particularly large numbers of them reached Cuba and Brazil. As the slave trade grew in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, Lagosian merchants also grew wealthy, powerful and increasingly independent of the Benin Empire (Aderibigbe 1975). The British colonization of Lagos in 1861 finalized the eclipse of Benin influence, as the Pax Britannica made Lagos the commercial and cultural Mecca of multiple and culturally diverse groups. Ìjèsà Òyó, Ègbá, and especially Ìjèbù, flooded into Lagos as its economy grew. Thus, a combination of the slave trade and British colonization turned Lagos from a sleepy, seaside town into a metropolis. Moreover, the character of British colonialism in Lagos made that city into fertile grounds for the articulation, by diasporic returnees, of an Òyó-centered, pan-Yorùbá identity.

The role of the British in this cultural convergence was no more predestined than that of Òyó. By the middle of the nineteenth century, when, in the interest of suppressing the slave trade, the British first established political dominion over Lagos, several earlier centuries of Portuguese commercial activity in this region had already established a Portuguese-speaking belt along the West African coast. That both Lagos and Porto-Novo still bear Portuguese names is symptomatic of the depth of the Portuguese presence. The rush of the British and the French to establish actual dominion over expanding areas of the region in the late nineteenth century created new forms of unity, as well as divisions, among towns and peoples. But there was no unifying force as great as the re-

²⁰ Whose capital lay not in the present-day Republic of Benin but in what is now Nigeria.

turn of Westernized ex-slaves from Brazil, Cuba, and Sierra Leone to the Coastal towns near their ancestral homes and the cross-regional communication that those returnees set up among themselves.

The Ọyó, Ègbá, Ègbádò, as well as Ijèsà, Ijèbú, and Nàgó, captives who reached Brazil in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries came collectively to be called Nagô. They were initially grouped together not because they had identified with each other but because slave traders regarded them as similar to each other and had collected them from the same ports of embarkation.²¹ However, a shared name and common experience in Brazil (as in other American locales) allowed them to develop a collective identity hitherto unknown in the African lands of their origin. These Nagô captives, and especially the Muslims among them, were prominently involved in a series of insurrections and conspiracies in Bahia between 1807 and 1835. In small numbers, some freed people had returned to West Africa from the 1810s onward; but the number of returnees peaked between 1835 and 1842, following the largest of the insurrections, in 1835 (Verger 1976; J.M. Turner 1975; M.C. da Cunha 1985; Reis 1987). Bahian officials ordered the expulsion of many suspected participants in the rebellion. Furthermore, an atmosphere of increased repression, head taxes, harsh punishment, curfews, restriction of movement, and so forth inspired many other manumitted Bahian Africans suddenly to act upon their earlier dreams of going home. Some manumitted Africans chartered ships to carry groups of friends and family, while others bought passage on commercial passenger or cargo ships (especially Verger 1976:317; Turner 1975[1974]:51; Lindsay 1994:24–25).

For the most part, these Africans returned to Lagos, Porto-Novo, and other such ports in what are now western Nigeria, the Republic of Benin, Togo, and Ghana. From 1820 to 1899, about 8,000 Afro-Brazilians returned to West Africa. Many of them suffered unspeakable physical abuse and extortionate taxation at the hands of Dahomean and other Coastal African kings. Their lives were everywhere insecure, but far less so, they discovered, in Lagos under the abolitionist British protectorate. In recompense to the British, the Brazilian returnees provided many of the architectural and other technical skills with which colonial Lagos was built. By 1889, even as the general population of Lagos continued to swell, one in seven Lagosians had lived in Cuba or Brazil, that is, about 5,000 out of 37,458 (Moloney 1889:269; Lindsay 1994:27; 47n31).

Equally crucial to the emergence of Coastal society and its Latin American diaspora was the later return of the Sàró to Lagos and its hinterland (see Kopytoff 1965). From the first decade of the nineteenth century, the British had made efforts to enforce legislation outlawing the slave trade. A pillar of these efforts was the British Royal Navy's capture of slave ships departing from the West African coast. The African captives thus rescued were generally resettled in Freetown, Sierra Leone, where they and their descendants came to be called

²¹ See Côrtes de Oliveira (1992) and Kubik (1979).

Creoles, or Krios. British missionaries quickly established programs to convert and school them, thus preparing a highly influential class of Western-educated Africans, whose families had originated disproportionately in what they would later help to designate as Yorùbáland. Upon their return to Lagos, they came to be called Sàró—from the local pronunciation of Sierra Leone.

The sudden proximity of Ọ̀yọ́, Ègbá, Ègbádó, Ìjèsà, and so forth in their Sierra Leonean exile had produced a number of effects relevant to our discussion. First, it made them aware of their similarities, particularly in the context of their shared difference from the peoples of the local Sierra Leonean interior, thus making a united Yorùbá—or, in this case, Aku—ethnic identity conceivable. Second, the Krios, and especially the Aku, were disproportionately Western-educated, literate, Christian, commercially active, and prosperous. They had access to employment in British government, schools, and missions far out of proportion to their numbers. Krio society produced numerous clerks, administrators, teachers, and ministers, whom the British colonial and missionary projects dispersed to various parts of West Africa.

By 1880, the number of Krios, or Sàrós, in Lagos roughly equaled that of the Afro-Latin returnees; but the education of the Sàrós in English and in British social conventions enabled them to achieve greater commercial success and a greater number of administrative positions in the emergent British colonial government of Lagos. More important, their high level of literacy allowed Sàró Christian ministers to produce the orthographic and lexical standards by which Yorùbá would be reduced to writing. Indeed, in the process of translating the Bible into a language that Ọ̀yọ́, Ègbà, Ìjèsà, Èkìtì, Òndó, Ìjèbú, Ègbábdó, and Nàgó could all understand, they produced for the first time a standard language, a language that thereby reified the ethnic unity of these peoples and named that unity by a term previously reserved for the Ọ̀yọ́, that is, Yorùbá.

Born near Ìséyìn, in the Ọ̀yọ́-speaking region, the African missionary, Samuel Ajayi Crowther, wrote *A Vocabulary of the Yoruba Language* in 1843. In 1844, he preached to the ex-captives from Ọ̀yọ́, Ègbá, Ìjèsà, and so forth gathered in Freetown in a hybrid language predominantly Ọ̀yọ́ in its morphology and syntax, and predominantly Ègbá in its phonemes, with its lexicon enriched by coinages and the speech of Lagos and the Yorùbá diaspora (Ajayi 1960; Adetugbo 1967, cited in Peel 1993:67). Numerous others, such as the Ọ̀yọ́-born and British-educated C.M.S. missionary, Samuel Johnson, also helped to establish a Yorùbá literary canon, which included not only a Yorùbá translation of the Bible but grand narrations of the Yorùbás' supposedly shared Ọ̀yọ́ legacy. In sum, though the original Yorùbá were Ọ̀yọ́, the Lagos on which the Sàrós and the Afro-Latin returnees converged in the mid-nineteenth century became the capital of a much more broadly conceived Yorùbá people—one that embraced multiple ethnic groups and indeed cross-cut continents. Moreover, the privileged position of the Sierra Leonean recaptives and, more generally, of diasporic returnees to Lagos in the British colonial project fur-

nished the emergent Yorùbá nation with a reputation for superiority to other Africans.

By the mid-nineteenth century, Sàró returnees of the proto-Yorùbá Ègbá ethnic group had set the stage for white Baptist and C.M.S. missionaries' special admiration for the Yorùbá. From that point in time onward, Church Missionary Society and Southern Baptist missionaries greatly amplified claims of Yorùbá superiority to other Africans. Much of their admiration rested on the well-organized character of local agriculture, the grandeur of the local monarchies, and the beauty of local religion and art, which all belied the racist apologetics of American slavery. However, Africa has never been short on magnificent and well-organized civilizations. Two facts may have inspired the selectiveness of missionaries' praise. First, whereas white Christian missionaries had repeatedly been turned away and mistreated by the materially and administratively impressive Ashanti and Dahomean kingdoms, the proto-Yorùbá Ègbá city of Abéòkúta welcomed them with open arms (Ayandele 1968). Second, the Òyó-centric reflections of white missionaries like T.J. Bowen suggest that they were influenced specifically by the Òyó-centric and pro-Yorùbá writings of Crowther and other Òyó-born writer-missionaries (see Bowen 1968[1857]). And, third, praising the potential of a particular part of Africa where the missionaries had established missions was one strategy to persuade congregations in the West to continue subsidizing these missions. It was the strategy adopted by Southern Baptist missionaries T.J. Bowen and William H. Clarke, for example, as they declaimed the educational, religious, agricultural, linguistic and commercial accomplishments and potentials of the local people, as well as the specific but exemplary educational and literary accomplishments of the black Yorùbá missionary Samuel Ajayi Crowther (Bowen 1968[1957]: especially 288–93; Clarke 1972: especially 271, 291).

By the 1880s, the reasoning of African C.M.S. missionaries and their Euro-American contemporaries had profoundly affected British colonial discourses as well. Of course, the proto-Yorùbá Òyó and many neighboring African groups amply shared the British predilection for royalism and tradition. However, colonialists had further reasons to praise the new Yorùbá collectivity. For example, the Governor of Lagos, Alfred Moloney, endeavored to encourage the economic development of the Lagos Colony and its hinterland by inviting the return of more African-Brazilians. So, he addressed one gathering of returnees thus:

You are the representative embodiment of the steady annual flow of Africans from Brazil to your own land in some instance[s,] in others to the land of your parents and ancestors (the grand, rich, and intellectual Yoruba land) (quoted in Verger 1976:551–4).

So committed was Moloney to the reality and dignity of Yorùbá-ness that he declared it erroneous to call the returnees “Brazilians” at all; they were, properly speaking, “repatriated Yorubas.” Years later, he regaled them, anachronistically, for having kept their dignified and ancient “Yoruba” language alive in

Brazil and Cuba (Verger 1976:551–4). In fact, no language by that name had existed at the time that most of them or their ancestors had arrived as slaves in Brazil.²² Captain W.A. Ross, the chief colonial officer in the Òyó Kingdom from 1906 to 1931 and personal friend of the ascending king, became another, even more forceful spokesman of Yorùbá dignity (Atanda 1970:108–9, 224, 254; Adas 1989:155–6, 158).

Thus, the reality of Yorùbá-ness and the discourse of its ancientness and dignity among nations had become an official truth in the British African empire. Whatever the economic advantages British colonial officials wished to use these official declarations to secure, these officials had now come to reinforce, authorize, validate and valorize a novel identity borne of African and African-diasporic experience. Moloney and others added official weight to an identity that cross-cut colonial, state and even maritime boundaries. Indeed, in 1890 and 1891, the colonial government subsidized the trial voyages of a regular steamship line between Lagos and the cities of the Brazilian coast. Though it ultimately proved too costly to operate, the project demonstrates the willingness of British colonial officials to encourage this trans-Atlantic identity, which has repeatedly received similar support from the late-twentieth-century Brazilian and post-colonial Nigerian governments as well (see Matory forthcoming). Support from missionaries and colonial authorities, far from being circumstantial or epiphenomenal to Yorùbá identity, is a major part of what brought that identity into being from the mid-nineteenth century onward, established its equivalence to a range of New World black identities and fashioned them into a trans-Atlantic nation of unparalleled prestige.

In sum, Òyó and various existing socio-political units around the Gulf of Benin supplied much of the cultural raw material of the Lucumí identity formulated in Cuba, the Nagô identity formulated in Brazil, and the Yorùbá identity that was first articulated in Sierra Leone. But the Yorùbá identity proper, which embraces the Òyó, the Ègbá, the Ègbádò, the Ìjèbú, the Ìjèsà, the Nàgò, and so forth cannot be said to have existed prior to the dispersion of these peoples to Cuba, Brazil, and Sierra Leone. Their novel collective identity was given substance by the new linguistic and literary forms that its advocates created in the nineteenth century, by its colonial and missionary uses, and, as we shall see, by the religious motifs that set this nation apart from others in the diaspora.

The cognates of terms like Yorùbá, Nagô/Nàgò, Lucumí, and Kétu/Quêto had probably predated the slave trade; but their application to all those peoples now called Yorùbá is of recent vintage. Equally recent is the idea that they share a common and primordial culture. Thus, to call the self-identified Òyó, Ègbá, Ègbádò, Ìjèbú, and Èkítù captives of even the late nineteenth century “Yorùbá” is

²² Indeed, some emergent form of this language had become the lingua franca in late-nineteenth-century Bahia, a fact that Rodrigues explains in terms of the sheer number of captives from proto-Yorubaland in Bahia (1988[1905]:130). Ramos, on the other hand, thinks that the dominance of that language might also have resulted in part from the literacy and literary accomplishments of its speakers (Ramos 1942:20).

an anachronism, in most cases, as Robin Law (1993[1984]; 1977) and J.D.Y. Peel (1993[1989]) have demonstrated. It reads a common-sense reality of the twentieth century back onto a period in which that reality was only beginning to be produced by formerly captive populations of Nagô, Lucumí, and Krios, who “returned” to colonial Lagos and its hinterland.

FROM COOPERATION TO CULTURAL NATIONALISM

Despite British infrastructural and moral support for the Yorùbá identity, the 1880s and 1890s were hard times for the returning bourgeoisie in Lagos. First, there was an economic downturn in the 1880s, which large and well-funded European commercial houses survived far more easily than did the smaller, African-owned enterprises. Second, the progress of British colonialism into the Lagos hinterland in the 1890s seems to have eroded pre-existing forms of cooperation between Europeans and Westernized Africans, authorizing in their stead a policy of white racial privilege.

Moreover, as European tropical medicine improved, increasing numbers of white British administrators, doctors, and missionaries arrived to take up jobs previously held by Westernized Africans, new arrivals who were prepared to use racialist discourses to assure their privileged access to the best jobs and the highest pay. Even when race was not offered as the official explanation, it became evident to many Westernized Africans that racism was, in fact, the grounds for many of the exclusions, demotions, and firings that they had begun to suffer in the colonial service and in the churches. The young white missionaries’ rejection of Bishop Samuel Ajayi Crowther’s leadership and his consequent resignation from the Niger Mission in 1890 were but the most famous case so interpreted by the Sàró and Afro-Latin returnees (such as Òmu 1978:109), and it precipitated a major movement toward the formation of independent African churches.

That resignation also contributed greatly to an ethos that historian J. F. A. Ajayi (1961) and a range of later scholars have described as a renaissance and as cultural nationalism. This turn-of-the-century Lagosian cultural nationalism flourished at the hands of journalists, tract writers, and composers, who sought to stimulate interest in “African history, language, dress, names, family life, religion, dance, drama and art forms” (Òmu 1978: 107–14). Though it occurred primarily in the 1890s, it had precedents in the 1880s, in the form of articles in the *Lagos Times*. A prominent theme there had been the “preservation” of the “Yoruba language,” since—and I quote one such article—it was considered “one of those important distinguishing national and racial marks that God has given to us” (1978:107–8).²³

Thus, in a generation, the Sàró appear to have changed from avid An-

²³ This passionate defense of Yorùbá language was a reaction to the Education Ordinance of 1882, which required students to read and write exclusively in English and forbade instruction in African languages (Òmu 1978:107–8).

glophiles, grateful for their liberation from slavers at British hands, to advocates of various forms of nativist African nationalism—or what was appropriately called “patriotism”—that opposed British cultural hegemony. Though Sàró literacy has made it easiest to document this process among them, it is also clear that, as a consciously political gesture, numerous Afro-Latin returnees also publicly adopted what they considered African and often specifically Yorùbá names, dress, and marital standards during this period (Ajayi 1961; Cole 1975; J. M. Turner 1975; M. C. da Cunha 1985; Lindsay 1994; Mann 1985; Omu 1978). It has now become a commonplace for New-World òrìṣà devotees in Brazil, Cuba and the United States to do the same as a mark of their own sacred nationality.

The nationalist changes in the self-conception of Westernized Africans on the nineteenth-century Coast are generally called cultural nationalism to distinguish them from both explicitly political challenges to British governmental policy and to mark them as precursors to the forms of activism that would later lead to the independence of the Nigerian national state. However, two further points are curiously absent from most existing discussions of this period and certainly from the implications of the “cultural nationalism” label. First, the people whose oppression concerned these nationalists and whose unity they assumed were characterized as much by their race as by their culture in the ethnographic sense. Nationalist writers of this period variously assumed that the “Black race” shared certain cultural characteristics separating them from whites or took all of the various African cultures that preceded the creole culture of the Coast to be more authentic and appropriate to members of their race.

Those recent analysts who have attended explicitly to the racial essentialism of these discourses have tended to attribute them to bourgeois Africans’ rather passive adoption of the vocabulary generated by European writers, such as Comte Joseph Arthur de Gobineau (as well as James Hunt) and propagated by European colonialists (see, for example, Okonkwo 1985:2–3; Law 1990:81–99). There are clearly parallels between some West African writers’ and some European thinkers’ conflation of race, culture, language, religion, and nation.

However, there is no particular reason to believe that even Anglophone African nationalists’ peculiar shuffling of these ideas was determined by any particular European intellectual’s theory. Indeed, there seems to be far more in Lagosian social history than in European intellectual history that inspired local nativists to conflate Yorùbá culture with Black racial unity. To begin with, racial binarism was, for Lagosians, no mere philosophical postulate. Lagos from the 1880s to 1915 was rife with racial discrimination. A Lagos that had in the mid-nineteenth century been divided among European, Brazilian, Sàró and indigene was, by 1910, divided into black and white. Visiting Lagos in 1911, art historian Leo Frobenius reported that even black policemen and postal clerks were hostile toward whites (Frobenius 1968[1913]:38–40; Cole 1975a: 75, 89). The theories of Arthur de Gobineau and James Hunt were themselves products of a

changing colonial dialogue rather than blueprints for the African creoles' response.

Indeed, if any particular literary or scholarly articulations of the notion of race strongly shaped the African creole response, they were those articulations that the African Creoles imported from the African diaspora. While the Lagosian press reveals no direct citations of Arthur de Gobineau or of Hunt, it is replete with references to the highly publicized experience of Black North Americans. Such references include news items and editorials reprinted from Black American newspapers and the serialized writings by W. E. B. Du Bois and Booker T. Washington, as well as those of the well-traveled Danish Virgin Islander, Edward Wilmot Blyden, who had studied and experienced racial discrimination in the United States. Blyden's flight from the United States took him in turn to the Black North American returnee colony of Liberia and then to Sierra Leone. This returnee and advocate of racial uplift and liberation even supported British colonialism as a means to pursue his goal of uniting large parts of Africa into a single state. His thinking enormously influenced generations of black political thinkers on both sides of the Atlantic.²⁴

From the turn of the century well into the 1910s, Lagosian newspapers regularly documented the lynching of Black North Americans and the racial forms of cooperation mobilized by them in order to escape murder and oppression, including "repatriation" to Liberia (Matory forthcoming). Lagosian newspapers exchanged many letters with Black North American newspapers, not to mention the fact that some of the foremost Lagosian publishers and political leaders of the day themselves had West Indian, U.S., or Liberian social origins, as did Jamaican mulatto Robert Campbell, who edited *The Anglo-African* newspaper. The editor of *The Lagos Weekly Record* newspaper, John P. Jackson, was the son of Black North American settlers in Liberia. Many Lagosians, such as Orishatukeh Fadumah, a Sàró returnee from Sierra Leone, had visited the United States. Thus, Lagosian cultural nationalism was also a racial nationalism inspired by the social experiences, political activism, and literary self-expression of the African diaspora.

Hence, the further oversight implicit in the term cultural nationalism is that any nationalism self-consciously referring to Black North American politics, to Black repatriation to Africa, and to racial unity at the turn of the century can hardly be represented as pre-political.

It should be noted, though, that Lagosian nationalism was no more determined by Black North American ideology and social conditions than by European ideology. For example, turn-of-the-century Lagosian newspapers participated in rather non-North American modes of doctoring its heroes' bloodlines.

²⁴ Concerning these New-World blacks' appearance in the Lagosian press, see, for example, Blyden's lecture "Christianity and the Negro Race" (August 25, 1883, 1:6, p. 3-4; September 29, 1883, 1:7, pp. 1-3; also in 1:9, pp. 1-3) and his article, "The Education of the Negro," in *The Lagos Weekly Record* (May 2, 1896, p. 5). See the citation of Blyden's ideas, for example, in *The Lagos Standard*, April 1, 1896, p. 3. See a reprint of Booker T. Washington's article, "The Blackman's View," in *The Lagos Standard* (April 22, 1896, p. 3). See W. E. B. Du Bois' "The Conservation of the Races," reprinted in *The Lagos Weekly Record* (July 31, 1897, pp. 2, 5-6).

Everyone from Africanus Horton and Alexander Crummell to W. E. B. Du Bois and Booker T. Washington was lauded in the Lagosian press as a “pure-blooded Negro,”²⁵ paralleling testimony recorded in Bahia between the 1890s and the 1940s by Raymundo Nina Rodrigues, Ruth Landes, and Donald Pierson in the late 1930s. For example, trans-Atlantic traveler Martiniano Eliseu do Bonfim and many of his Afro-Bahian contemporaries were quoted proclaiming the superiority of black or African racial purity, which they appear to have associated with, and held on par with, African cultural purity (Landes 1947: e.g., 23, 28.; Pierson 1942:273, 292; see also Rodrigues 1988 [1905]:216 and 1935[1896]:170–1).

The talk of racial purity on the West African Coast surely also has precedents in some British colonialists’ and some Anglo-Saxon slaveholders’ contempt for their culturally and racially mixed subjects. British traveler Mary Kingsley’s ideas on the dignity of African racial and cultural purity were also widely quoted in the Lagosian press. Even more widely quoted were E. W. Blyden’s similar ideas. He associated the dilution of both African culture and African blood with weakness, disease, and social decay (see Law 1990:88). However, what the presence of this novel and distinctive ideology in both colonial Lagos and the Bahian Candomblé during this period demonstrates is the strength and the transformative power of the link between the two places. Black racial cultural purism has been documented in Bahia precisely from that period onward.

As noted above, a recent, critical ethnography has credited the Euro-Brazilian intellectuals and social elites themselves for arbitrarily inventing notions of Yorùbá superiority and Nagô purity. However, despite the claim of recent anti-essentialist ethnographers like Dantas that, from the 1890s to the 1970s, Euro-Brazilian intellectuals saw and endorsed “Nagô purism” in the Candomblé, it is difficult to find references to any such observations or endorsements in their writings. While Nina Rodrigues, Arthur Ramos, and Edison Carneiro clearly approved of the Nagôs’ preeminent dignity and relative “preservation” of their traditions, these early ethnographers also described the complex inter-ethnic and Afro-Catholic “syncretism” found in all the Brazilian Candomblé temples they had observed (see Rodrigues 1945[1905], 1935; Ramos 1940:35, 137–8;

²⁵ E.g., “Dr. Crummell is a pure Negro” (*The Lagos Standard*, September 2, 1896, p. 3). “Paul Lawrence Dunbar the young rising poet of America is of pure African blood” (*The Lagos Standard*, November 11, 1896, p. 3). See also *The Lagos Standard* of April 6, 1898, on “the famous Askia the great”—“a full-blood negro”; and *The Lagos Weekly Record* of August 29, 1891, p. 2, on the extraordinary success of “pure-blooded Negro youths” in European educational institutions appear intended as disproof of theories of Negro inferiority. In the *Nigerian Chronicle* (November 19, 1909, p. 6), the writer expresses pride in the full-blooded black doctor, Africanus Horton, and deplores his mistreatment. An introduction to the reprint of Du Bois’ “The Conservation of Races,” describes Du Bois as “a pure Negro” (*The Lagos Weekly Record*, July 31, 1897, p. 2). See also critical remarks by the *Lagos Weekly Record* editor, John P. Jackson, about the ideas and mixed racial background of T. Thomas Fortune, editor of *The New York Age*. Though these Lagosian journalists developed the logic of Black racial purism to an extreme, such purism was preceded in Black North America and was cited in the Lagosian press. For example, an article reprinted in the *Lagos Weekly Record* (May 23, 1896, p. 5) from a Black North American publication called *The Reformer* advocated pride in the race, racial loyalty, and racial purity as a necessary condition of racial improvement.

Carneiro 1967:263–4). The earliest and most influential of these ethnographers, Raymundo Nina Rodrigues, focuses his arguments on the evolutionary inability of blacks to embrace pure monotheistic Christianity, not on the purity of any given African practice. Strikingly, most of the explicit claims and endorsements of racial and cultural purity in these early ethnographies appear in direct quotes from the African-Brazilian priests and travelers themselves (see Landes 1947:23, 28, 80, 155, 169, 196–7, 200; Pierson 1942:273, 292). In sum, there is no reason to think that the early ethnographers taught Afro-Brazilians this value. These values have a complex contextual genesis and a cosmopolitan set of discursive precedents—particularly in the Lagosian Renaissance and its dialogue with the Anglophone Black Americas in an age of Jim Crow. The chief advocates of Nagô-centrism and African purism in Brazil were African-Brazilian priests and travelers themselves.

“TRADITIONAL RELIGION” AND THE INVENTION OF THE YORÙBÁ

Though literate Christians and missionaries did much to create the Yorùbá identity, traditional religion (*esin ibile*) remains one of its chief emblems. For example, the kingships of Yorùbá towns remain attached to rites and mythologies of traditional gods, or òrìṣà. For this and other reasons, the gods Ifà, Odùdùà, and Ṣàngó remain central in any twentieth-century discussion of collectively Yorùbá political and cultural tradition. Primers like *Daramola* and *Jeje's Àwọn Àṣà àti Òrìṣà Ilẹ̀ Yorùbá* (Traditions and Òrìṣà of Yorubaland, 1967) continue to wed Yorùbá identity to dignified images of non-Christian religious traditions.

But what accounts for the image in the diaspora that Yorùbá traditional religion is superior to that of other African peoples? Anglo-Yorùbá literacy and the returnees' success as colonial intermediaries were certainly persuasive media of Yorùbá prestige. However, the image of Yorùbá superiority was not articulated in Western terms alone. For example, in Freetown, the Aku masking societies modeled on the Egúngún of the Ọ̀yọ́ and Ègbá became a “cultural diacritic,” as Barth (1969) might call it, marking and reinforcing Krio distinctness from other local ethnic groups. These masking societies were so closely associated with Krio power and prestige that they became an object of imitation for the non-Krio migrants from the Sierra Leonean interior. It was in such ways that the premise of Yorùbá religious superiority to other African ethnic groups appeared at the very nineteenth-century origins of the pan-Yorùbá ethnic identity (see Desibes 1877: 318–9, 322, 348) and remained closely associated with Yorùbá/Nagô/Lucumí religion in the Brazilian and Cuban diasporas, as noted in the testimonies recorded by Nina Rodrigues, Donald Pierson, and Ruth Landes in Bahia and by Lydia Cabrera and Esteban Montejo in Cuba.²⁶

In the late nineteenth century, Afro-Brazilian travelers participated not only

²⁶ On observers' sense of Yorùbá superiority in Cuba, see Cabrera (1983:27), Barnett (1994:34–35), Ortiz (1973:51).

in validating the image of Yorùbá superiority but in establishing its foundational role in the emergent scholarly literature on African-American religions. First, Afro-Brazilian returnees were the chief informants, translators and hosts of the French Catholic Society of African Missions, affiliates of which penned a range of documents on òrìṣà religion that are cited extensively in the African-Americanist literature, including Fernando Ortiz's seminal Yorùbá-centric account of Afro-Cuban religion (1973[1906]: e.g., 28).²⁷

The most influential English-language and Yorùbá-language literature on West Africa entered Afro-Latin American scholarship chiefly through the mediation of the Afro-Brazilian travelers. On their frequent return trips to Brazil, these travelers brought knowledge of the Lagosian Renaissance literature. In an intellectual biography of Raymundo Nina Rodrigues (founder of Afro-Brazilian studies and founding scholarly advocate of Yorùbá superiority), Andrade Lima cites the pivotal contribution of an African-Brazilian traveler and friend of Rodrigues:

Lourenço Cardoso, of Lagos, Nigeria, merchant, [Rodrigues'] English professor and Nagô [Yorùbá] translator, who was [in Bahia] for a time and referred Rodrigues to the work of Col. A. B. Ellis (Andrade Lima 1984:7).

Ellis is the author of *The Yoruba-Speaking Peoples of the Slave Coast of West Africa* (1895). For his part, Nina Rodrigues' African-Brazilian informant, Martiniano do Bonfim, provided Rodrigues with a translation and critique of the Church Missionary Society text *Iwe Kika Èkẹrin Li Ede Yoruba* (The Fourth Primer in Yorùbá Language—see, for example, Rodrigues 1935:42–43 and 1945[1905]:356). Both of these texts and their African-Brazilian interpreters are prominently cited in Nina Rodrigues' classic works on Afro-Brazilian religions—*O Animismo Fetichista dos Negros Bahianos* (The Fetishistic Animism of the Bahian Blacks, 1935[1896]) and *Os Africanos no Brasil* (The Africans in Brazil, 1988[1905]). Note also that not only Ellis' but Nina Rodrigues' books are, in turn, prominently cited in the work of early Cuban folklorist Fernando Ortiz (see Ortiz 1973[1906]) and that the image of Yorùbá superiority surfaces again both among Afro-Cubans and in the Afro-Cubanist textual legacy (such as Cabrera 1983:27; Barnet 1994:34–35).

Highly literate informants like Martiniano do Bonfim were also actively involved in the establishment of the Bahian Candomblé houses now regarded as the most “purely African” and “purely Nagô” in Brazil. In fact, based upon his interpretation of his academic studies in Lagos, Martiniano directly designed a set of liturgical innovations that survive up to this day in the Bahian Ilê Axé Opô Afonjá temple, which is now regarded as the single most “purely Nagô” temple in all of Brazil.²⁸ Yet these were not the only coastally-inspired ritual innovations that made Opô Afonjá pure. Part of what impressed sociologist

²⁷ Among these S.A.M. affiliates are Fathers Noël Baudin, Pierre-Bertrand Bouche, E. Courdioux.

²⁸ For example, Martiniano published in a Bahian newspaper his own account of the new of-

Roger Bastide with the “purity” of the Opo Afonja temple in Bahia was that it “conserves the old lunar calendar, found in a Bible translated into Nagô” (Bastide 1983:263).²⁹ The African sources of the Bahian Candomblé, are complex and often closely related to major cultural developments in Africa that postdated the end of the slave trade.

The most influential publication of the Lagosian Renaissance era was *The Yoruba-Speaking Peoples of the Slave Coast of West Africa*, published in 1894 by the commander of the British West India Regiment in Lagos, Colonel A. B. Ellis. It clearly plagiarized Father Baudin’s earlier, returnee-influenced account of “Yoruba” religion in Porto-Novo. Among the features that Ellis added was a laudatory tone typical of Ellis’ Lagosian surroundings during the nationalist renaissance. Citations of Ellis are omnipresent in the early-twentieth-century literature on Afro-Brazilians (see Rodrigues 1988[1905]; Ramos 1946[1937], 1940[1934]); on Afro-Cubans, see F. Ortiz 1973[1906]); and, on Black North Americans, see Puckett 1969[1912]).

Due to its singular importance as a source of written information about Africa for the early African-Americanists, it should not be forgotten that Ellis’ book continued the most extensive project of apologetics and documentation ever undertaken for an African religion other than ancient Egypt’s up until that date. *The Yoruba-Speaking Peoples* appeared amid an explosion of lectures, pamphlets, books and newspaper articles by bourgeois Yorùbá intellectuals and effectively conveyed to numerous African-Americanist authors the sort of mythological complexity and organization that they had found lacking in other, more sparsely documented African religions. In English and in Yorùbá, turn-of-the-century Yorùbá intellectuals constructed, codified and valorized an ancestral religious legacy. Ellis’s publication also followed decades of E. W. Blyden’s and Mary Kingsley’s ambiguous campaign of doubts about the suitability of Christianity for “the Negro,” as well as the publication of J. Abayomi Cole’s *The Revelations of the Secret Orders of Western Africa* (1887) and “Astrological Geomancy in Africa” (1888). Ellis’ publication briefly preceded J. George’s “Historical Notes on the Yoruba Country” (1895), Orishatukeh Fadumah’s article “Religious Beliefs of the Yoruba People” (1896), Rev. E. M. Lijadu’s book *Ifa* (1897), Rev. James Johnson’s *Yoruba Heathenism* (1899). Others included Dr. Abayomi Cole’s lectures on Yoruba religion; Rev. Mojola Agbebi’s studies of òrìṣà religion in Ọ̀yọ́, Ọ̀wu, and Ọ̀wò³⁰; Oyeşile Keribo’s pamphlet, “His-

lices that he had introduced into the bureaucracy of the Ilê Axé Opô Afonjá Temple during the priestly reign of Mãe Aninha. Martiniano had reportedly established the role of patrons known as the “12 Ministers of Xangô” based upon its precedent in the Ọ̀yọ́ kingdom, about which Martiniano learned during his eleven-year sojourn in Lagos. Since he had never traveled to the inland kingdom of Ọ̀yọ́, this restoration or innovation must have been based on what he had read or heard in Lagos. See “Os Ministros de Xangô,” *Estado da Bahia*, May 5, 1937.

²⁹ See also Angarica (1955:5) on a usage of the Yoruba Bible in the propagation of “Santería,” or Lucumí religion, in Cuba.

³⁰ See *West Africa*, August 22, 1903, VI:211–14.

tory of the Gods" (1906); and various series of newspaper articles by Adeṣọla (a.k.a. Rev. E. T. Johnson), someone writing under the initials F. S., and by editor Chris Johnson in the *Nigerian Chronicle* (1908–12).

Note that these writings by Christians do not necessarily recommend the practice of òrìṣà religion. They more often point out the complexity, wisdom, dignity and ancient pedigree of its various elements and claim Yorùbá religion as an ancestral or national heritage and as a natural precursor to the Yorùbá people's conversion to an African form of Christianity (see Barber 1990). Yet, like Baudin and Ellis, these Yorùbá Christian writers advance a project of documentation and codification that has been easily appropriated by literate nationalists on both sides of the Atlantic. In projects validating the Yorùbá national legacy and canonizing its centrally religious dimension.³¹

TRADITION AND TRADE IN THE TRANS-ATLANTIC YORÙBÁ NATION

Thus, during the African cultural renaissance in turn-of-the-century Lagos, Africans and at least one European wrote numerous books, pamphlets, and newspaper articles describing and dignifying so-called Yorùbá traditional religion. However, the effectiveness of these texts as vehicles of trans-Atlantic Yorùbá identity depended on their mobility and benefited greatly from their service to the commercial interests of the Afro-Brazilian travelers. The publication and availability of these writings coincided significantly with the period when sailors, black business people, English professors, and, not least importantly, mail ships were frequently traversing the Atlantic. Recall, for example, that the government of colonial Lagos itself subsidized direct steamship service between Lagos and the cities of coastal Brazil in 1890 and 1891.

In the lamentably incomplete Bahian archives of return voyages from Lagos, I have counted dozens of ships and hundreds of free Africans traveling from Lagos to Bahia or through Bahia to Rio or the State of Pernambuco between 1855 and 1898. Journalistic, epistolary, and oral historical evidence reveal the repeated journeys of another score of African-Brazilian travelers up to the 1930s.³² Many of them carried British passports, and most appear to have been engaged in commerce.

³¹ For example, see Rodrigues (1935[1896]:42–43) on Martiniano's critical appropriation of *Iwe Kika Ekerin li Ede Yoruba* (1944[pre-1896]), a primer by the Yoruba Protestant missionary, Andrew L. Hethersett.

A direct heir to the Lagosian cultural renaissance, the Christian Reverend, David Onadele Epega not only wrote several tracts on Ifá early in the twentieth century but founded a late-twentieth-century dynasty of priests of the Yorùbá traditional religion. His grandsons have initiated priests in Chicago, Florida, São Paulo, and probably other places as well. They also continue the publishing legacy of the grandfather and father.

³² Arquivo Público do Estado da Bahia (hereafter A.P.E.B.), *Registro de Entrada de Estrangeiros*, 1855–56, Seção Colonial e Provincial, livro #5667 (January 9, 1855; March 21, 1855; November 20–21, 1855; January 11, 1866; January 28, 1856); A.P.E.B., Presidência da Província, Polícia do Porto, Mapas de saída e entrada de embarcações, 1886–93, Seção Colonial e Provincial, Maço (package) #3194–5, File for 1889[sic], June 12, 1869 [n.b., this 1869 item is out-of-place

Theirs was a truly transnational identity configuration and commercial endeavor, long before transnationalism and globalization became the catchwords of our present era. These traders appear to have capitalized on their intercontinental nationality, providing West Africans with òrìsà-related goods and services identified with “the white man’s country,” while also providing Brazilians with òrìsà-related goods and services uniquely authenticated by their African origin.³³ The African-Brazilians’ religious expertise and the relatively low-profit margins made religious supplies one sphere of trade exempt from major European competition (see Cunha 1985; Matory forthcoming). Thus, not only their national identities but their livelihood clearly depended on the construction and defense of Africa’s sacredness, of Yorùbá superiority, and of the “African purity” of the material and ideological capital they carried with them on their return trips to Brazil.

CONCLUSION

What came to be classified as Yorùbá tradition fed on cultural precedents in the hinterland of Lagos, but its overall name, shape, contents, standards of membership, meaning, means of transmission, and relative prestige would have been radically different—if they had come into existence at all—were it not for the intervention of a set of diasporic financial, professional and ideological interests that converged on the West African Coast. Returnees from Brazil, Cuba, Jamaica, North America, the Virgin Islands, and Sierra Leone converged on Lagos during the nineteenth century and not only composed a novel African ethnic identity but, through a literate and politicized struggle, guaranteed that it

but was indeed found in the 1889 file]; A.P.E.B., Presidência da Província, Polícia do Porto, Mapas de saída e entrada de embarcação, 1873–78, Maço #3194–3, see January 31, 1876. See also A.P.E.B., Presidência da Província, Polícia do Porto, Mapas de entradas e saídas de embarcações, 1878–85, Maço #3194–49, file for 1879, July 15, 1879; A.P.E.B., Presidência da Província, Polícia do Porto, Mapas de entradas e saída de embarcações, 1878–85, Seção Colonial e Provincial, Maço #3194–4, December 20, 1878; A.P.E.B., Presidência da Província, Polícia do Porto, Mapas de saída e entrada de embarcações, 1886–93, Seção Colonial e Provincial, Maço #3194–5, file for 1889, June 4, 1889; A.P.E.B., Polícia do Porto, *Registro de Entrada de Embarcações*, 1886–90 (Maço #5975, e.g., May 27, 1885 [sic]; October 22, 1885[sic]) and 1889–92 (Maço #5976, e.g., p. 7), Seção Colonial e Provincial; A.P.E.B., *Livros da Inspeção da Polícia do Porto—Entradas de Passageiros*, vol. 6, Anos: December 4, 1891, to March 21, 1895, August 27, 1892, p. 80; A.P.E.B., *Livros da Inspeção da Polícia do Porto—Entradas de Passageiros*, vol.8, Anos: January 2, 1896, to December 31, 1898, March 7, 1898; A.P.E.B., Polícia, *Registros de Passaportes*, 1881–85 (Book #5909) and 1885–90 (Book #5910), Seção Colonial e Provincial; Moloney (1889:255–76); L. Turner (1942:65); Olinto (1964:266–7); M. C. da Cunha (1985:123, 125); Pierson (1947:239); Verger (1976:464); Lindsay (1994:43–44); 1995, interviews in Lagos, Rio, and Bahia with Paul Lóla Bamgbose-Martins of Lagos and Rio, Regina Souza of Salvador, Beatriz da Rocha of Salvador, Aír José Sowzer de Jesús (Aizinho) of Salvador, Albérico Paiva Ferreira of Salvador, George Alakija of Salvador, and Yinka Alli-Balogun of Lagos—all descendants of turn-of-the-century African-Brazilian travelers and, many of them, travelers in their own right. For a complete list of sources, see Matory (forthcoming).

³³ See the Journals of Rev. Thomas Benjamin Wright (CA2 O 97), April 14, 1867, C.M.S. Archives, University of Birmingham. I thank J. D. Y. Peel for alerting me to this reference.

would be respected in a unique way by generations of students of Africa and its diaspora.

This historical revision is offered, first, for its potency in repealing the model of agentless, collective memory that is usual in the representation of African culture in the Americas and at home. What is often called cultural memory or tradition in both the African diaspora and at home is, in truth, always a function of power, negotiation and strategic re-creation. The tract writers of the Lagosian Renaissance and the English Professors of Brazil selectively reshaped the meaning and the value of shared practices—they reified and redefined African cultures as much as they transmitted them. Thus, at this *locus classicus* of African-diaspora studies—and of diaspora studies generally—we are well advised to restore agency to our models of cultural memory.

None of this is meant to suggest that the agency of literate nationalists has been the lone or sufficient vehicle of black Atlantic cultural transmission. Powerfully mnemonic ritual song and dance genres are the most conspicuous reminders of the African legacy and emblems of diasporic community in the African diaspora. However, these bodily practices possess no intrinsic historical meaning and embody no self-evident program for community building. Rather, they are mobilized as emblems and as proof of influential verbal assertions of shared meaning, community membership, and social hierarchy—the most broadly influential of which have been published assertions. Even in these supposedly remembered, preserved, and traditional cultures, written texts have become major and transformative vehicles of such cultural transmission and identity-formation.³⁴ In my view, it was a long-running, transnational literary movement that differentiated an extraordinarily successful black Atlantic nation, like the Yorùbá, from a merely successful one, like the Congo/Angola nation. Indeed, the Yorùbá-identified òrìsà worshipers of Brazil and the United States have begun propagating their legacy on the internet.

Diasporas are often studied as though time had stopped in the homeland. This false premise inspires the second major critical point of this argument. The construction of original cultures and classical origins is always ideological, regularly subject to the changing political conditions of the homeland, and always subject to the historically changing interests of contemporary interlocutors. Those interlocutors thus participate in the transformation of the contemporary cultures that model themselves on classical origins. The Yorùbá have arguably become the preeminent exemplar of sub-Saharan African civilization and the

³⁴ This point both affirms Anderson's 1983 argument that vernacular print media have enabled the citizens of the nation-state to "imagine" themselves as a community, and amends that argument, first, by recognizing the "imagining" power of multi-lingual communities like these trans-Atlantic nations and, second, by recognizing the ritual, musical and bodily practices that nationalist writers often rely on and re-interpret in order to substantiate their own partisan visions of community. Unlike Connerton (1989), I do not suppose that traditions of bodily practice exempt the social memories they embody from controversy or from a role in the tendentious re-interpretation of the past.

Candomblé perhaps the paradigm case in ethnohistorical studies of the African diaspora. The foregoing historical revision argues that these linked cases are less like the roots and the tree or like the origin and the outpost than like Siamese twins—the fate of each continually affecting the other. This case, then, is recommended as the paradigm for a dialectical approach to the relationship between diasporas and homelands generally (also Skinner 1982). Here we see how transnational politics have reshaped a diaspora and its homeland through their radically coeval dialogue. A new light is thus shed not only on the perennial question of what is African about African-American cultures but also on the question of what diasporas generally—Jewish, Irish, Indian, Chinese, and so forth—have to do with the nations they call home.

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