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***From Africa to Afro:
Use and Abuse of Africa in Brazil***

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FROM AFRICA TO AFRO: USE AND ABUSE OF AFRICA IN BRAZIL

Throughout the trans-Atlantic exchanges that led to the creation of traditional as well as modern black cultures, 'Africa' has been endlessly recreated and deconstructed. 'Africa' has been a contested icon, used and abused by both high- and low-brow cultures, by popular and elite discourses on the nation and the people that were to be created and moulded in the New World and, last but not least, by progressive and conservative politics. In Latin America, as a matter of fact, 'Africa' has not only been part and parcel of the making of black culture, popular culture and new syncretic religious systems, but also of the imagery associated with the modern nation and, more generally, of modernity and modernism (Rowe and Schelling 1991). Images, evocations and (ab)uses of 'Africa' have, therefore, resulted from the interplay and struggle between white intellectuals and black leadership, popular and elite cultures, political ideas developed in Western Europe and the United States and their reinterpretation in Latin America. That is, 'Africa' in Brazil has largely been the result of the system of race relations, much more than of the capacity to retain what Herskovits (1941) called Africanisms. If one accepts this view, then it is no surprise that both conformism and protest have related to and created their own 'Africa'.

In focusing on Brazil, especially the city of Salvador da Bahia and the region around it, this paper tentatively explores these practices over the last century in high-brow culture and official discourse on nationhood, as well as popular versions of the same. It also describes how 'Africa' — that is, interpretations of things and traits held as being of African origin — has been pivotal in the commoditisation of black cultures, in the production of what we can call 'black objects'. Generally speaking, in Brazil, and perhaps throughout Latin America, elite/intellectual and popular discourses on the African origins of society and culture have rarely been compared. Most accounts are, in fact, based exclusively on the former. Even though I will try to sketch out the historical developments of such processes from the eve of the

abolition of slavery in 1888 to this day, my focus will be on the period, starting in the late seventies, of the 're-democratisation' of Brazil.

Let me first try to give a definition of black culture(s) that suits the purpose of this paper. Populations defined as 'black' in the New World and in the Caribbean Diaspora in Europe have produced a variety of black cultures¹ and identities which relate, on the one hand, to local systems of race relations and, on the other hand, to historical similarities internationally, deriving from common experiences as slaves, and to more recent internationalising phenomena with the globalisation of cultures and ethnicities. Black culture can be defined as the specific subculture of people of African origin within a social system which stresses colour, or descent from colour, as an important criterion for differentiating or segregating people. Black cultures exist in different contexts: they differ between societies which are predominantly white and societies in which most of the population is defined as non-white, but a prevailing somatic norm places those with features defined as African or Negroid at the bottom, or near it (cf. Whitten and Szwed 1970:31). Black culture is, by definition, syncretic (Mintz 1970: 9-14).² A specific binding force in black culture is the shared feeling of a common past as slaves and as underprivileged. Africa is used as a 'symbol bank' from which symbols are drawn in a creative way (Mintz and Price 1977). At the same time, black culture is also, to a great degree, interdependent with western urban culture. In fact, as Paul Gilroy had suggested, black culture and identity are created and redefined through a triangular exchange of symbols and ideas between Africa, the New World and the black Diaspora to Europe. For example, ideas of negritude, blackness and pan-Africanism created in the New World have always been inspired by either African intellectuals and struggles for independence, or by images of what African societies were prior to European colonialism. This process of making black cultures has also created the contours of a transnational, multi-lingual and multireligious culture area, the Black Atlantic (Gilroy 1993). However, this process also gives to black cultures and ethnicities a special status in the world of inter-ethnic relations.

On the one hand, the transnational and multiethnic origins of black cultures in the New World have, in many ways, anticipated the new ethnicity of late modernity — and shows that not everything about the new ethnicity is really new! On the other hand, in a world where the ‘value’ of ethnic cultures and identities is their distinctiveness vis-à-vis Western urban culture, black cultures do not enjoy the official recognition of ‘established ethnic cultures’ (e.g. a distinct language or the status of an immigrant minority in an industrialised country). Black people have more problems than most other ethnic minorities in defining themselves as a culturally distinct or politically based community. The reason for the failure of the dominant societies to legitimate black culture is the historic use of racial markers to maintain hierarchy within specific national economies and national political systems.

Hence, I am much more concerned with creativity than with the retention of possible ‘Africanisms’, in the way ‘Africa’ is re-invented for political reasons, rather than in the capacity to retain African culture through centuries of hardship.

THE THREE PERIODS OF RACE RELATIONS AND BLACK CULTURE IN POST-ABOLITION BRAZIL

Brazil is the country that received the most slaves from Africa. Between three to fifteen million Africans were sent to Brazilian shores. The slave trade started earlier and ended later than in any other country in the New World. The terrible living conditions, the low cost of slaves at certain times in history and relative proximity to Africa are three key reasons why Africa and Brazil have had much more exchanges than the other large slave society, the United States. Here, there is neither time nor space to expand. It suffices to say that as a consequence, Brazil has the greatest concentration of descendants of Africans outside Africa. The origin of the slaves in Brazil was and still is controversial. It is commonly accepted that they mostly came from the Gulf of Guinea and the region around the Congo river delta (Miller 1999; Côrtes de Oliveira 1999). The slaves were put to work in a variety of activities, first on sugar plantations, and later on mines, coffee

plantations and cattle ranches. Of course, some of the slaves worked in domestic services, while others carried out a variety of activities from fishing to hawking. Some slaves managed to develop their own economic activities and earned money in their spare time. That money was often used to buy manumission, which though difficult to gain in Brazil, was usually more easily available there than in the US.

The State of Bahia, which has long played a central role in the making of 'Africa' in Brazil, will be given special attention in this paper. In the past, this State and the region around its capital Salvador (Recôncavo) attracted the attention of travellers who depicted it in their accounts as the 'Black Rome' — the largest concentration of what was considered African cultural traits and traditions outside of Africa, if only for the sheer size of its black population. Later, starting from the turn of the century, Bahia took a central place in the ethnographic prehistory of Afro-Brazilian culture through the work of Nina Rodrigues, Manuel Querino and Manuel Bomfim. From the thirties, it also took a pivotal position in the formation of modern Afro-American anthropology (cf. Ramos 1939; Frazier 1942, Herskovits 1943). Inspired by the pursuit of 'Africanisms' in the New World, several anthropologists and sociologists (Herskovits 1941; Pierson 1942; Verger 1957 and 1968; Bastide 1967) held Brazil, in particular the coastal region of the State of Bahia, as one of the areas in which black culture had maintained African traits to a greater degree than elsewhere. Hence, it was on Bahian soil that the debate among sociologists and anthropologists about the origin of black culture started in the thirties: is contemporary black culture a surviving Africanism or a creative contemporary adaptation to hardship and racism? In fact, Bahia has been historically central, not only in high-brow discourses, but also in popular constructions with regard to 'Africa' and Africanisms in Brazil.

For analytical purposes, three periods can be identified in race relations in Brazil in modern times, each corresponding to different levels of economic development and integration of the black population into the labour market.

Between the end of slavery in 1888 and the 1920s, indus-

trial employment was minimal. With mass immigration from Europe, often substituting for the freed slaves, the labour market allowed little social mobility for blacks. Race relations were shaped by a society which was highly hierarchical, both in terms of colour and class (Bacelar 1993). Black people, who were overwhelmingly part of the lower class, 'knew their own place', while the elite, which was almost entirely white, could easily keep its ranks closed without feeling threatened (Azevedo 1966).

The second period started with the populist dictatorship of Vargas in the thirties and ended with the right-wing military regime in the late seventies. In the thirties, opportunities for the black population in the formal sectors of the labour market were opened on a large scale for the first time, mostly in the public sector. The authoritarian populist regime of Vargas limited immigration and favoured the 'national' labour force in its modernisation project. A second important thrust in the integration of the black population came from the mid-fifties to the mid-seventies. This period was characterised by populist government and later, from the military coup of 1964, by an authoritarian regime which promoted state-sponsored economic growth led by import-substitution. Now, industrial jobs were open to blacks. More blacks than ever managed to get jobs in the formal sector with greater chances of social mobility. From 1964 to 1983, Brazil was run by a military junta which repressed civil rights and discouraged black organisation. Nevertheless, the decade from the early seventies to the early eighties saw a slackening in military control, with the growth of creativity in black organisations and black culture. The new black workers showed interest in black pride and black organisations (Agier 1990, 1992) for two reasons. On the one hand, through ascending social mobility, a new generation of black workers met colour bars that had not been seen before. On the other hand, these black workers had more money and time to spend on organised community and leisure activities. New black movements and all-black carnival associations were formed. Black culture and religion acquired more official recognition. In Bahia in particular, new powerful forms of black culture were being created. The mass media labelled this process the 're-

Africanisation' of Bahia (Bacelar 1989; Agier 1990 and 1992; Sansone 1993).

The third period spans the re-democratisation from the early eighties to the present day. Over these years, recession combined with democratisation and rapid 'modernisation' have led to a combination of new dreams and frustrations. Many channels of social mobility that had been very important for the earlier generation are not relevant any more for the younger generation. For example, opportunities in the old manual crafts, heavy industry and public employment have decreased, while the real value of salaries has collapsed, lowering the formerly relatively high status of these jobs. In addition, new forms of segregation — usually subtler and not explicitly based on colour — emerged in some burgeoning sectors of the labour market, such as luxury shopping malls, where the job requirements of 'good appearance' and 'good manners' tend to discriminate against darker candidates (da Silva 1993, Guimarães 1993). In the meantime, other changes have led to increased standard of living expectations. In Brazil, as in many other Third World countries, mass schooling together with the mass media, have contributed to a revolution of rising expectations. Another important factor has been the opening up of the country to commodities, ideas, sounds and cultures from abroad. After centuries during which only a small elite had access to foreign goods, Brazil has passed from isolation to participation in the world economy as an important 'emerging market', as this large Third World economy is now often fashionably called. Previously, because of import-substitution policies, many imports were not available; now, imported goods are available for sale, but are very expensive and hence exclusive for the overwhelming majority of black Brazilians.

New dreams also emerged from increased acceptance of black cultural expressions by the state and official culture. Also, the leisure business is more interested in black culture. More than ever before, black culture is prominent in the images and discourses of official and commercial Brazilianness (*brasildade*) and Bahianness (*baianidade*).

The system of race relations and racial terminology, as well

as the nature of racism and black ethnicity have changed over these periods. Each period corresponds with different strategies of the state and others, such as the mass media, towards Afro-Brazilians, as well as with different emphases in national and intellectual discourses on the racial texture of the nation. It goes without saying that each of these three periods corresponds with different meanings and uses of 'Africa'. After this, I analyse the roles and discourses of various agents and agencies, including intellectuals, the state, black leaders and popular black culture.

Prior to Abolition, images of slavery — dominated by the combination of brutality and miscegenation that seems to have characterised Brazilian slavery — impressed a long series of foreign travellers who reported on this exotic tropical society with a mixture of disdain and infatuation. The African origins of the slaves and ex-slaves has often been reported. In the eyes of the beholders, an 'African atmosphere' pervaded in market places, ports, music, dancing, food, habits and other aspects of daily life. However, one can argue that the presence of the cultural traits of people of African descent in Brazil became a 'problem' for the state and policy makers only after the abolition of slavery. During slavery, the slave condition was even more important than physical appearance, with the population of African origin divided into slaves, freed, free-born and 'mixed' (mulattos). The division between African-born and Brazilian-born (*crioulo*) was also important with the former usually given the heavier tasks. With the abolition of slavery, things changed. After slavery, Brazil never experienced legally sanctioned racial segregation: physical appearance, rather than African origins or slavery, started to determine one's status.

In defining what was African in Brazilian society, and in the making of the 'black' population, foreign travellers no longer produced the key texts. Instead, this role was taken over by a relatively new group of *ensaistas* of 'pre-scientific' essayists involved in building the new nation which emerged following the coup that installed the republic in 1889. Coping with Africa in Brazil was the key question. Modernity was a must and had to be

achieved, either by whitening the population through massive white immigration from Europe, or through general improvement of the health conditions of the native population. It ended up with a bit of both, with neither of the two approaches ever really becoming dominant.³ However, in spite of the debate over the place of African descendants in the new nation, both ‘scientific racism’ and dreams of incorporating the black population were aimed at making a new Brazilian ‘race’ though not biologically. African traits were to be removed from street life and the market place. Brazilian cities had to look ‘European’, never mind that mortality rates in Brazil were often worse than in Africa. Health campaigns, for example against yellow fever, were followed by ‘clearing unhealthy regions’ — often those associated with high concentrations of descendants of Africans. Informal economic activities, also associated with African descendents, had to be banned from the city centres. The practice of drumming (*batuque*) and Afro-Brazilian syncretic religions were either banned or limited; only in the 1940s were *candomblé* houses no longer obliged to register with the police.

Yet, ironically, it is precisely after the African-born population had shrunk to a small percentage of the total population, that black Brazilians started to celebrate their Africanness in an open and organised fashion — as it became a powerful icon to be used to acquire status in the Brazilian context (Butler 1998). From the 1880s, the crowning of African kings and queens, traditionally a celebration of a sumptuous past and the ‘civilisation’ of Africa in the face of current hardship at various moments during slavery, became the core of pageants during carnival. Banned from official carnival celebrations for their supposedly disorderly behaviour — that is, playing drums loudly — in Rio and Salvador, black citizens form associations with which they negotiate worthy places with the white ‘owners’ of the carnival (Fry, Carrara e Martins-Costa 1988). In Salvador, the two main carnival associations emphasising the greatness of Africa were the *Embaixada Africana* (African Embassy) and the *Pândegos da África* (the Merry Africans). To these blacks, ‘Africa’ in the carnival was not disorder, but rather the opposite, orderly moving exhibitions of the magic

and greatness of mythical African kingdoms (Querino 1955).

The last decade of the last century and the first decade of the present one was also the period during which a few spiritual *candomblé* leaders started to establish contact with Africa itself. They benefited from the continuous trickle of contacts that had always united Bahia with West Africa during and, to a lesser extent, after the slave trade. The nuclei of former Brazilian slaves who had settled in the port cities of Dahomey (now, Benin) and Nigeria (see Carneiro da Cunha 1985; Verger 1968) buttressed this trans-oceanic exchange. Tobacco and liquor were exchanged for cola nuts, holy images and handicraft. According to Mathory (1999), it was precisely around the turn of the century that the greatness of the Yoruba people started to be celebrated internationally, as a proud and educated people who withstood the pressures of colonialism and have a sophisticated religion of their own. Such greatness soon reverberated throughout the whole Afro-Latin world and, as we shall see later, apparently became the banner for those who advocated African purity in the black cultures of the New World.

If the purging of African traits from Brazilian culture as well as from the 'Brazilian race' the key feature of the first period, the second period was characterised by incorporation of certain aspects of black culture into the national self-image as well as their commoditisation and commercialisation. This went hand in hand with four interrelated trends:

- a) the adoption of a myth of origin of the Brazilian population as part of the official discourse on the Nation. The 'myth of the three races' (the Indians, the Africans and the Portuguese) which melted to create a new potentially colour-blind 'race' had already been celebrated over previous decades in poetry and the fine arts. Now, it became part and parcel of official cultural policies and of the liturgy of the State (Damatta 1981);
- b) the emergence of a black political organisation which attempted to organise nationally; the Frente Negra emphasised

universal measures in favour of ‘Brazilians of colour’ as well as nationalistic populism (‘Brazilian-born citizens first’), and de-emphasised the cultural differences of the black population with the rest — for this purpose, the recent past in Brazil was much more relevant than a distant past in Africa, a continent these black activists often described as ‘primitive’;

- c) the so-called re-Africanisation of Afro-Brazilian culture;
- d) the de-stigmatisation of black culture in urban Bahia to the point that it became part and parcel of the public image of the State of Bahia.

The State and social scientists — both more powerful than in the first period — contributed to the last two trends besides insiders as well as outsiders. These agents operated by identifying, within the complexity of Afro-Brazilian cultural traits, those they considered ‘pure’, which supposedly expressed the most sophisticated contributions of noble African cultures to the Brazilian culture and Nation. To these ‘pure’ traits were opposed supposedly ‘less noble’ and ‘impure’ traits, which ostensibly represented either less sophisticated African cultures or had been corrupted by exaggerated syncretism with a set of ‘negative forces’ in Brazilian culture, such as the *malandro* (hustler) mentality, the magic of the ‘civilised’ *índios*, popular Catholicism and, last but not least, African as well as non-African black magic. In this dichotomy of African influences, the good ones were associated with what were alternatively identified with the ‘Yoruba’, ‘Nagô’, ‘Mina’ or even ‘Sudanese’ cultures of the slaves deported from Sub-Saharan Western Africa. According to a long line of intellectuals, starting from the late nineteenth century (Nina Rodrigues 1988), slaves from these ‘sophisticated’ parts of Africa comprised the overwhelming majority of Africans in Bahia and other parts of Brazil, such as Maranhão, where ‘purer’ forms of *candomblé* emerged. Where African religious systems became ‘bastardised’, this was blamed on the supposedly ‘Bantu’ origins of the Africans concerned. The ‘Bantu’ were described as uncouth and unskilled compared to the ‘Yoruba’, and therefore, more prone to either submit to a master or to combat him by the most

notorious sort of black magic. Historical research shows that the idea of the ‘Yoruba’ as more civilised, but also more rebellious, was already present in public opinion and among slave-owners around the end of the eighteenth century. The Malê rebellion in 1835 in Salvador, usually seen as due to a conspiracy led by Muslim slaves (Reis 1986), certainly contributed to this reputation. However, it was only after foreign travellers reported of ‘Yoruba’ pride and fine traits in their written accounts, which often became best sellers in Brazil, that such popular stereotypes gained credibility and acceptance, before becoming part of the self-image of the new Nation.

Modern research on the African origins of Afro-Brazilian culture started with a number of important first-rate anthropologists and historians, like Ramos, Freyre, Tannenbaum, Carneiro, Herskovits, Pierson, Elkins, Verger and Bastide (see Góis Dantas 1988). Their analyses usually took off from these travellers’ reports, the images (paintings and engravings) that went with them⁴ and a limited number of ethnographic descriptions from around the turn of the century, mostly by Nina Rodrigues and Manuel Querino. Today, we know that both the foreign travellers and these ethnographers from the early history of Brazilian anthropology were rather impressionistic in their accounts (see, among others, Slenes 1995; Vogt e Fry 1996).

Interestingly, in those days, the highlighting of the ‘Yoruba’ and downplaying of the ‘Bantu’ were part and parcel of an eager attempt to give a positive image of black Brazil, and particularly Afro-Bahia, to the rest of the world. In fact, as often happens in the case of academic writing about phenomena relating to ethnicity and nationalism (see, among others, Handler 1988), social scientists and ethnic advocates, for different, but nonetheless complementary reasons, tend to give similarly sympathetic images of the groups or communities in question. These communities were then described as more cohesive, homogeneous and integrated that might have been the case had their agendas been different. Moreover, local and federal governmental agencies — with the Ministry of Culture of the Estado Novo regime in the vanguard — contributed to this process of ennobling the ‘Yoruba’,

by purging 'impure' elements and promoting 'purer', dignifying and 'civilised' aspects of black culture as much as possible.

It is striking that these polar constructions of the African presence in Brazil also fed on an internal polarity typical of all versions of black culture in the Afro-Latin or Afro-Catholic world that I am aware of⁵ — namely that between purity/resistance and manipulation/adjustment, the two extremes between which black people have traditionally constructed their survival strategies as well as the discourses about them.

From the early sixties, contacts with Africa increased greatly. At the time of African decolonisation, the Brazilian government — even the military dictatorship which began in 1964 — started to develop a presence in Africa. Even though Brazil did not take part in the movement of non-allied nations, it sought to develop South-South relations, if only as a way of gaining greater international acceptance as a great nation. It was in this context that two research institutes received support from the government, albeit somewhat inconsistently. First, the Centre of African and Oriental Studies of the Federal University of Bahia — partly through its journal *Afro-Asia* — had already become an important institutional base in the 'scientific' reconstruction of 'Africa' in Bahia and Brazil. Later, from 1974, the Centre of Afro-Asian Studies of the private Candido Mendes University — which also publishes a journal, *Estudos Afro-Asiáticos* — has been fostering exchanges with Africa, mostly in the field of economic and social-anthropological research and training, especially with the former Portuguese colonies.

The re-democratisation of Brazil, starting in the early eighties, brought a new wave of ethnic consciousness and paved the way for the development of a politics of identity within a society which had known a powerful universal tradition thus far — a tradition organised and defended by the state apparatuses, but also celebrated in art and popular culture through countless reinterpretations of the 'myth of the three races'.

Now, the main agents are different. The Federal Government, affected by cuts in public spending and by negative memo-

ries of its centralised and censorial cultural policies, is losing ground. Local governments, on the other hand, have gained more space, strengthened by the decentralisation of power and new legislation. In its 1988 Constitution, the State of Bahia includes the teaching of African History in secondary schools and policies for promoting a multi-ethnic image for governmental agencies. Such new multi-culturalist measures create new demands for information and symbols African, often pre-packaged essentialised bits and pieces of African cultures and sweeping generalisations about the nature of 'African people'. These shortcomings are common in multi-cultural experiences, but become more acute in a country where public education has collapsed (Sansone forthcoming). Thus, mass media and tourism have become more important in the making of modern black culture. Social scientists have become much more numerous than in the second period; a number of (mostly, junior) black researchers have emerged, but individuals and professionals have become less politically influential, partly due to the popularisation of the social sciences.

The cultural situation has changed, too. On the one hand, it is certainly easier and more rewarding to 'behave black' and to show one's interest in 'Africa' than thirty years ago, if only because acceptance of alternative youth styles has increased (Araujo Pinho 1994); for example, only one generation ago, dreadlocks would almost have been considered a sign of lunacy. The mass media has also — at long last — started to accept that Brazil has a huge black and brown population. In certain sections of society, one even comes across a sort of new 'negrophilia', which creates a new space for certain forms of aestheticised blackness. This time, however, it is not confined to artistic vanguards and intellectuals, as in pre-World War II Paris (Gendron 1990). Rather, it is the expression of a popular yearning for the exotic and the sensual — associated with black people — in a society on the periphery of the West wanting to be increasingly rational. On the other hand, this period has seen the emergence of a new *movimento negro*, which sees its major task as deconstructing the idea of Brazil as a 'racial democracy'. To these activists, Brazil — which has a racial system based on a colour continuum — ought

to be reinterpreted binarily, with a sharp divide along colour lines (*negros vs. brancos*). Moreover, the Yoruba/Bantu polarity mentioned before is now taken for granted by most black activists, a large group of intellectuals and — in Bahia — academics, and even by the progressive wing of the Catholic Church, which tries to accommodate black pride by incorporating symbols associated with a great ‘African past’ in its liturgy. Hence, some black activists and *candomblé* spiritual leaders have been struggling to de-syncretise the Afro-Brazilian religious system by purging any reference to popular Catholicism, Kardecism and ‘black magic’. ‘Africa’ has been central for claiming the purity of a particular *candomblé* house against rival houses, usually described as ‘less African-based’. To some *candomblé* houses, often those most visited by intellectuals and anthropologists, regular journeys to Africa as well as displaying in public (magic) objects brought from Africa have become essential for success in the very competitive religious market in which they operate (Prandi 1991; Gonçalves da Silva 1995; Capone 1998).

But what is actually considered ‘African’ in Brazil? Throughout the three periods mentioned earlier, the determination of ‘African’ is mostly impressionistic. Objects, lexicon and music beat are defined as African often by superficial association and similarity, by visual observation — rather than through careful research, which is still scarce. ‘Looking African’ or ‘sounding African’ is, in fact, what makes things ‘African’ — so, a group of sturdy black men toiling at the central market of Salvador makes it an ‘African’ market in the commentary of the many photo-books for sale to tourists and travelling anthropologists alike.⁶ In the process, a specific foreigners’ gaze has certainly contributed to the making of a particular kind of ‘Africa’ in Brazil. A good case in question was the way in which Melville Herskovits identified certain cultural traits or social habits as containing degrees of what he called Africanisms, or, in more recent times, the bias in favour of things Yoruba of the Bahia-based French photographer and ethnographer Pierre Verger — something that reminds us of Ruth Benedict’s preference for the Apollean Puebla people over the rather Dyonisian Kwakiutl people.

In each of these three periods, the commoditisation of black culture and of Africa has mainly revolved around one specific set of 'black objects'. This is what I try to show now.

CONSUMPTION AND COMMODITISATION IN
TRADITIONAL AFRO-BRAZILIANS FORMS

Two major variants can be identified in the history of Afro-Brazilian culture, each of which is associated with a city — Rio de Janeiro and Salvador da Bahia. Scientific accounts as well as popular discourses have tended to associate the former with *metissage* and cultural manipulation, and the latter with *negritude* and cultural purity.

In Rio de Janeiro, the process of commoditisation of black culture has mainly revolved around two famous interrelated items, samba music and carnival. In the period stretching from the twenties to the seventies, both expressions developed from ghetto forms to become bases for the (spectacular) representation of Brazilianness. Thus, modern popular culture was created through a complex interplay among a number of nationalist intellectuals, who saw their mission to be intellectually 'organic' to popular (black-mestizo) culture, and black 'popular intellectuals' (often poets and composers of samba lyrics) such as Pixinguinha and Paulo da Portela (Vianna 1995; Farias 1998), who met in clubs. In Rio, black culture became equivalent to playing samba (in particular the percussion), composing samba and *samba-enredo* (the type played in the carnival parade) lyrics, and being a dance virtuoso during the samba schools parade during the carnival. A number of other aspects could have been chosen as 'typical' of black Rio, for example, the *jongo* dance or the local version of the Afro-Brazilian religious system usually called *umbanda*. However, *jongo* remained a dance of a single lower-class neighbourhood, Serrinha, until a group of black activists recently decided to promote it as the most authentic and undiluted form of black culture in Rio. *Umbanda* has often been seen by anthropologists (e.g. Bastide 1967; Ortiz 1988) as a polluted, whitened form of black religion, because its pantheon includes elements from

Kardecism, black magic of different sorts and popular Catholicism, besides a set of deities of African origin. Nevertheless, it remains very popular among the lower and lower-middle class, but has hardly ever been upheld as typical of black culture. In fact, as one *umbandista* once told me: ‘Umbanda is Brazil, *candomblé* is Africa’. This helps us to understand why the relatively small, but slowly growing number of black activists in Rio have preferred to focus their soul-searching efforts on a few ‘more genuinely African’ *candomblé*⁷ temples on the outskirts of the city, which have been created over the last decades by immigrants from the North East or by former *umbanda* priests who converted to *candomblé* and sometimes even claim a direct genealogy with a particular Bahian *candomblé* house.

If a number of aspects of Rio de Janeiro black culture have become essential for the public representation of Brazilianness at home and, even more so, abroad, a set of aspects of traditional Afro-Bahian culture have become an obligatory source of inspiration for black culture elsewhere in Brazil. In these representations, Bahia is the opposite of Rio. In Rio, manipulation, in a variety of forms, is seen as constituting the basis of black cultural creativity — the carnival parade, though highly commercialised and hierarchical, still reflects that mixture, *sincretismo*; the act of borrowing and even cultural patchwork are clever and beautiful, and indeed can mean the first prize. In the representations of Afro-Bahian culture by outsiders as well as a selected number of insiders who operate as representatives and mouthpieces of the black community, what is held as clever and beautiful is the ability to relate to Africa, and to use this to be loyal to tradition. *Sincretismo* can be an instrument, as long as it is used to recreate a past and a link with Africa (Capone 1997 and 1998; Teles dos Santos 1999). So, in a way, black culture in Rio looks to Bahia as the main source of African purity, while Afro-Bahian culture looks to Africa as the main source of inspiration and legitimisation of its role as the Black Rome of the Americas.

In Rio, black culture has been turned into a commodity, largely around the Rio Carnival, whereas in Bahia, roughly over the same period, from the 1920s to the 1950s, black culture was

constructed as a religious culture and commoditised mainly around the symbolic universe of the Afro-Brazilian religious system and its 'African' objects. It was largely due to the presence of *candomblé*, and to interpretations of black culture and even social life in general in Bahia as revolving around this religious system, that Bahia gained its prime position in Herskovits' scale of Africanism in the America: together with the Surinam interior and Haiti, it was the region in which African traits had supposedly been most retained (Herskovits 1941: 27). This centrality of *candomblé* was given a most important further boost by the Afro-Brazilian Museum in Bahia, founded in 1974, the first of its sort in the country. The collection has basically consisted of images and statues of *orixás* (deities), accessories, garments and music instruments used in *candomblé*. These objects are exhibited besides their West African 'counterparts' — from 'Yoruba' cults — selected in Dahomey by the French photographer-ethnographer Pierre Verger, who settled in Bahia in 1942.⁸ Verger took a formal position in a famous *candomblé* house and was a key figure in the re-establishment of cultural exchange between Brazil and West Africa (Fry 1985). Before Verger, several renowned anthropologists and sociologists had already been fascinated by this *Roma Negra*: Donald Pierson, Ruth Landes, Franklin Frazier and Melville Herskovits. Though from different perspectives, all of them left Bahia deeply impressed by the 'African' traits in *candomblé*.

There are, however, also less well-known objects that have come to represent traditional Bahian black material culture, as well as behaviour, that have come to be seen as 'typical' of black culture.

The *mulheres de acaraje* or, simply, *Baianas* (women, often of very dark complexion, who sell typically Afro-Bahian food and sweets in the street) have been, for centuries, the most visible icon of 'Africanism' in public life. Foreign travellers and later, anthropologists, photographers and tourists have been seduced by these women, dressed in their sophisticated and expensive *pano da costa* (which is said to be so genuinely African that one cannot find it in modern Africa any longer), well known for their rela-

tionship to *candomblé* (the most ‘authentic’ *Baianas* show their allegiance to *candomblé* by wearing the colourful necklace of one particular deity and by setting apart, in their stall, some food for their personal ‘saint’ or *orixá*). In the past, these women were considered socially dangerous, keen on gossip, evil because of their black magic powers and even a cause of public hygiene concerns. A visible reminder of how strong the African presence in Bahia was. However, starting from the forties, the *Baianas* became central in the novels of the renowned writer Jorge Amado and in the hagiographic ethnography of ethnographer-photographer Pierre Verger.

A similar status transformation occurred with regards to Bahian cuisine in general. A number of folklorists (e.g. Hildergarde Viana 1979) were witnesses to the fact that up to the thirties, one could speak of ‘culinary racism’, by which for the light-skinned middle classes, everything prepared in *dendê* (palm oil) was considered unhealthy, filthy and only fit for *negros*. Already in the forties, a number of books had appeared celebrating Bahian cuisine for its ‘otherness’, for being the African contribution to Brazilian national cuisine — which, like the Brazilian ‘race’ is said to integrate three influences — the white/Portuguese, the *negro* and the *índio*. Today, palm oil is accepted by everybody, as part of daily life for the lower classes and only on special days for the middle and upper classes.

An inversion of value has also taken place around the black body. Two examples can be given. In the twenties and thirties, *capoeira* — a mixture of dance and martial art to the music of the *berimbau* string instrument and group singing (often including a lexicon which is said to be ‘Yoruba’ or ‘Bantu’) — became a ‘national sport’. The condition for that was accepting a set of written and moral rules meant to stress that it was not (any longer) for rough youth or a form of ritualised street fighting. Knives and rocks were banned, and actual physical contact restricted to the minimum. It became the Brazilian martial art. In a way that recalls the division, also formalised in those years between *umbanda* and *candomblé*, *capoeira* was divided into two schools, with separate rules, associations and relationships to

politics. The *regional* was and still is more acrobatic, fast and seemingly violent. The *Angola* — accompanied by songs which include many words said to be of African origin — was and still is more thoughtful, slower and more closely associated with self-knowledge and blackness. Starting from the late seventies, *capoeira Angola* has attracted many black activists, intellectuals and highly educated tourists or travellers eager to cultivate an ‘authentic’ black sport. *Capoeira regional* has become a standard part of army and police training, and is often taught in sports schools together with other martial arts. Interestingly, the *Angola*, which has a much smaller, select following in Brazil, is over-represented among the *capoeira* schools that have been opened abroad by a new generation of black Brazilians. Such schools can be found all over the US,⁹ in Germany and the Netherlands.

Up to the forties, showing the *ginga* (the ‘balancing’ way of walking that was assumed to be typical of black people) could mean problems with the police, who associated it with misbehaviour, and dancing in *rebolado* fashion (characterised by thrilling leaps) was considered unsuitable for good girls and a sign of lower-class status (see, among others, Landes 1942). Both terms appeared in the lyrics of musical star Carmen Miranda (a Portuguese-born brunette), who made a fortune by re-packaging them, in her famous tropical fruits outfits, in a number of Hollywood films of the time. From then, it became clear that *ginga* and *rebolado* were not obstacles to social mobility, as such, but a Brazilian contribution to modernity — if properly presented and packaged. The recent success of Bahian Afro-pop has gone further to make the special sensual way of moving, supposedly typical of men and women alike in Bahia, part and parcel of most of its lyrics and stage performances. Over the last three years, special crash courses in sensual Bahian dance have been taught in the week before Carnival to Brazilian and foreign tourists.

What can we make of these ostensibly traditional *comunidade negra* and *cultura afro-baiana*?

The term *comunidade negra* is not identical with the ‘black community’ as in the US, but rather, the ‘politicised’ black-mestizo population: those who visit the five more celebrated,

‘traditional’ and ‘purely African’ *candomblé* houses,¹⁰ black activists and a number of black intellectuals. These narrow definitions have been adopted by the popular mass media and by the State of Bahia — which inscribed them in its 1982 Constitution. Already by the forties, a number of key aspects of this *comunidade* had gained fame and even acceptance in certain circles of elite cultural life as dignitaries of Afro-Bahian culture.¹¹ In those years, two international Afro-Brazilian Congresses — in Recife and Salvador, which brought together several of the best known social scientists of the times¹² — also invited the most famous ‘traditional’ *candomblé* priests, offering them a prestigious platform.

Cultura afro-baiana is a term which usually implies a narrow definition of culture as something centred on the practice and symbols of the Afro-Brazilian religious system. It is articulated in culinary practices, characterised by the use of palm oil and magical associations of each ingredient and dish with a saint of the *candomblé* pantheon, and percussion music, with each drum beat calling a particular saint or part of the *candomblé* liturgy. Up to the seventies, traditional Afro-Bahian culture was defined in the social sciences as a lower-class phenomenon. According to Bastide (1967), middle-class individuals could only participate in Afro-Bahian culture by developing a dual consciousness or even a split personality, with a white half and a (lower-class) black half. Otherwise, such individuals would be schizophrenic. To Bastide, and many others (among others, Ramos 1939; Carneiro 1937), black cultural practices could not be reconciled with upward mobility and, more generally, with modernity.¹³ If this was ever the case, this view is still open to debate. In any case, as pointed out by recent research, things are different now (Figueiredo 1999).

However, such narrow definitions of black culture and community did not and still do not fit several sub-groups in the black population, which perceived this celebrated *cultura afro-baiana* as a straitjacket at times. Over the last twenty years, a growing number of young people, whose lives are rather secularised and for whom participating in black culture is basically a

matter of having fun. They are more seduced by black dance than by black religion, and feel that this well-behaved, educated and Apollean version of black culture is not theirs.

NEW CONDITIONS FOR BLACK CULTURE:
MORE COMMODITISATION?

Objects and traits characterising black culture and the ‘African element’ have changed a lot over the last twenty years.¹⁴ First of all, pivotal changes have taken place in Brazil and its race relations system in this period. The country has seen a whirlwind of seemingly contradictory developments. It passed through a stage of intense industrialisation and economic growth in the sixties and mid-seventies before entering a long recession, from which it has not yet fully recovered; from a tumultuous democracy in the early sixties to a military dictatorship and then, democracy again from the mid-eighties onwards, followed by rapid political disenchantment; and demographically, from a 70% rural society to one which is 70% urban. It experienced an educational revolution, which led to a ‘revolution of rising expectations’ among all strata of society — even though educational growth has not matched the increased requirements of the more technologically sophisticated labour market. The country has given up its import substitution policy and is opening up to foreign trade. Over the last six years, for the first time, a small, but growing section of the population (approximately 2%) has begun to travel abroad, such tourism being encouraged by the favourable exchange rate (now over) and often being *muamba*, that is, associated with massive purchases of foreign goods, often to be re-sold back home. This complex process, which I can only outline here, has led to an overall broadening of the horizons within which black Brazilians situate their survival strategies — for the first time, a sizeable group of blacks, mostly young, thinks and feels internationally. Moreover, this process goes hand in hand with another important trend, the collapse of the status system based on the labour market position of one’s parents. This is due in large part to the decline in purchasing power associated with the types of unskilled jobs that

most poorly educated black Brazilians might be able to get. Such a trend is occurring in a society that is attaching more value, than a generation ago, to lifestyles which entail conspicuous consumption. In addition, there is now a growing number of people for whom a steady job has become unusual. The increasing specialisation and segmentation of the labour market have gone hand in hand with a narrowing of the symbolic distance between the expectations of different social classes in terms of quality of life, purchasing power and quality of work. One consequence of this demand for upward mobility is that, in the consciousness of the lower classes, a growing number of jobs are regarded as undesirable or 'dirty'. Over this period of time, Brazilian society has become less hierarchical in terms of class, gender and colour, especially as a consequence of the spread of equality and individual rights embedded in the democratisation process and promoted by increased education as well as the mass media (in Brazil, *telenovelas* have been a key vehicle for such messages, Vink 1989). On the one hand, mainly for young blacks, it seems possible to overcome social boundaries previously believed to be major obstacles. On the other hand, at long last, a middle-income group is becoming visible in the black population. This contradicts traditional constructions of blackness as a lower-class phenomenon, and of black people as either unable to acquire status symbols or doing so clumsily because of 'lack of manners'. As many of the wealthy would put it, blacks are no longer content with their (inferior) place. It is not for nothing that an increasing share of racial discrimination complaints in Brazil involve better educated blacks and the sphere of consumption, often of luxury goods or high-quality services (Guimarães 1997).

Of course, all this creates new conditions for black culture and its commoditisation. This is most evident in the younger post-military regime generation — those who, at the moment of writing, are up to forty years old — and, in particular, those with better education and income. They are the more 'modernity' oriented and dynamic sections of the black population.

The following are the new features and criteria by which modern black culture distinguishes itself from non-black culture

and from traditional Afro-Bahian culture. The latter is still important, but only as one source of inspiration, as a choice rather than as an imposition.

Black hair, always a feature with which ethnicity can be demonstrated or denied (Mercer 1990), is now manipulated and trimmed in many more ways than in the recent past. Together with home products (herbal products and tools for plaiting kinky hair), a whole new brand of imported products and, more recently, foreign products fabricated nationally under licence, have made it possible to use one's hair, 'to speak through one's hair', in many more ways than just by being 'neat' (which mostly meant straightened hair for women and short hair for men) or an outsider (one of the ways by which bums were and still are stigmatised is their ungroomed hair). Nowadays, women and, to a lesser extent, men have a large variety of hair-cuts and hair-dos with which they can 'speak', negotiate and situate themselves, such as curled, relaxed and waved hair for women, as well as 'neat square head', 'tattooed scalp', 'springs' and various types of dread locks for men.

Body language is also a domain in which blackness can be openly expressed or even performed — by creating numerous new ways of greeting in public, walking (swinging one or other parts of the body in order to 'do the balance') and dancing (here, there would be a long list of new dance styles; at least one new style is launched at each carnival).

Public performance of a purported (new) black sensuality is matched by the verbalisation of a number of adopted terms, some of them new and others more traditional, but 'rediscovered'. This is the case with terms like *ginga*, *suíngue* (from the English word 'swing') and *axé* (a 'Yoruba' word which expresses the Bahian 'way of life' as allegiance to the universe of *candomblé*, where it means 'soul'). Also, in ethnic terms, this new black culture distinguishes itself by adopting the term *negro* to define a black person — a term increasingly popular among the younger generation, especially among the better educated (Sansone 1993). Thus far, such terms have mostly been used by black activists and in Liberation Theology.

This new black culture has also become more visible

through fashion. The Afro look, which arrived in Bahia in the late sixties through the images of James Brown and The Jackson Five, has now been diversified into a number of variants: African robes and turbans are used, especially during the carnival and in a number of carnival-related events; the *funkeiro* look of electronic and dance music aficionados; and the black activist look, which incorporates both Afro and ‘African’ attributes — such as the sunglasses of the former and the flowery garments of the latter.

Once, the power of objects and symbols associated with the practice of *candomblé* largely depended on their being kept secret, hidden and private. Nowadays, they are being turned into commodities that can and have to be shown. So, the colourful *contas*, necklaces dedicated to one’s saint-*orixa*, which were once kept under one’s shirt (basically, as an amulet), are now proudly displayed and kept outside the shirt. Commenting in public about your saint is now possible. Similarly, over the last three decades, the images of *orixás*, once kept indoors or timidly shown to restricted audiences with the *candomblé* liturgy, have been turned into public celebrities, which can be exhibited and celebrated in all carnival-related activities, and can even be reproduced larger than life to make public buildings, parks and fountains more beautiful.¹⁵ To be used for ethnic identity, religious symbols and objects have to lose their secrecy and have to be exhibited and symbolically exchanged.

All these ‘black practices’ are performed and lived out in various contexts, some of which are relatively new, for example, the Afro carnival associations, the public rehearsals of these associations in the six months leading to the carnival, the Black Beauty contests organised by these Afro carnival associations as well as by TV and radio stations. In a way, they are also performed in new ways in two important traditional domains of Afro-Bahian culture: *capoeira*, which has diversified into an important tourist attraction when performed in the street, as a site for the redefinition of black identity, and Bahian cuisine, which has now reclaimed its African roots on all occasions when it is exhibited to outsiders. Moreover, *capoeira*, Bahian cuisine and, to a lesser extent, the Afro/African dimension of the Bahian carnival and a

number of the 'purest African' *candomblé* houses have become omnipresent commodities in tourist brochures and even in tourist tours through the city.

Upholding these black objects as typical of modern blackness is associated with an inversion of their original lower-class aura by a process of 'de-classing', a desacralisation of symbols and objects associated with *candomblé*, and a renewed emphasis on the (black) body. Can we consider the black body a commodity? It was certainly so during slavery when commodities could also be people and not just things (Kopytoff 1986). It can still be the case if we understand the body in a broad sense, which includes artefacts such as haircuts, garments, jewellery, make-up, gadgets, as well as mimicry and speech.

By way of summary, this is what we call the 'new black Bahian culture', which distinguishes itself by a number of key characteristics. It is centred on colour and the cunning use of the black body, rather than on the symbolic universe of the Afro-Bahian religious system; it has a much closer connection with youth culture and the leisure/music industry — an industry that has grown enormously over the last thirty years together with the tourist industry; it is much more internationally-oriented than ever, and poses a renewed emphasis on consumption. In other words, the new generation of young black-mestizos from Bahia insists on being black AND modern. Their new black ethnicity — based on the estheticisation of black culture and conspicuous use of the black body — lends itself to a thoroughly different attitude to consumption and, in turn, creates new conditions for commoditisation (Appadurai 1986). If only because, today, a number of commoditised items of black cultures — 'black objects' — are present in global flows.

IMPORT AND EXPORT IN BLACK CULTURE

The import and export of black objects has always been part and parcel of black culture and identity. In fact, these objects have circulated across long distances and over long periods of time, thanks to their commoditisation.

In Bahia, approximately up to World War Two, international cultural influences were relatively weak and much less influenced by the US than nowadays. Imports of black commodities were limited, and occurred, by and large, within the channels offered by the (neo)colonial networks which linked Bahia with Portuguese-speaking Africa and the Catholic Church. In the case of popular music, US styles were less influential than Caribbean and Latin American styles.¹⁶ Tourism was almost unheard of. Travelers and a limited number of sojourners and social scientists, like Herskovits, Frazier and Verger, provided extra international connections. In fact, up to World War Two, across the Black Atlantic, most exchange was within, rather than across, the English, French, Spanish and Portuguese language zones.

In recent times, this exchange has accelerated and changed. Today, imports of black objects are mostly associated, in one way or another, with ‘modern blackness’.

In the field of music, reggae — and its stylistic paraphernalia — is undoubtedly the most influential foreign genre. Other black music genre from abroad only rarely make it in the charts. African (pop) music has made little inroad into the Brazilian music market and, in fact, is hardly for sale, with the occasional exception of some well marketed crossovers such as the album *Music for the Saints* edited by Paul Simon. That is, African sound — an important source of inspiration for most Brazilian musicians — is more imagined than actually listened to. Brazilian musicians only gain access to African music when they are abroad — where they often reside and have their records produced (on pop music in Brazil and commerce, see Sansone & Teles dos Santos eds. 1998; Perrone & Dunn eds. forthcoming).

Many of these modern and foreign black objects relate to the domain of fashion and body care. Often, items that define a specific black (youth) style — clothes, hair, personal gadgets and ornaments, and demeanour — are imported, either as actual goods or as models to be imitated by local means. In Salvador, at least three black youth styles would have not been possible without such foreign contributions: the black activist look (which developed from the Black Power [here pronounced *pau*, a word that

refers to wood, but also to penis] to the ‘African’ look from the eighties onwards); the mostly lower-class *funkeiro* and the black gay scene. Most trendy beauty products are also imported or increasingly produced in Brazil under foreign licenses. In this way, one can choose between cheap, local non-ethnic products and expensive global ethnic products. It is more expensive to look ethnic than assimilated — to have rasta hair than plaited hair.

As to African art and clothes, access is now less restricted to travelling intellectuals and *pais de santo* (*candomblé* priests). The increasing number of African students and immigrants, mostly from Portuguese-speaking Africa, has certainly increased the quantity as well as modified the nature of the exchange with African art and clothes. Some of them sell African fabrics and handicrafts in order to pay for their studies. In exchange, when they travel back to Africa, they sell Brazilian panties and bikinis (which are said to better fit the African body), CD’s of Brazilian pop music and pirated recordings of *telenovela* TV series.

In the past, Bahia exported ‘black objects’ that were held as key objects of traditional Afro-Bahian culture, such as images and statues of *orixás* (the *candomblé* deities, most of whom are associated to a Catholic saint), photos of religious ceremonies (not always shot with the consent of the people portrayed), clothes and ornaments of the *povo de santo* (the most active followers of a *candomblé* house) and *candomblé* musical instruments, mainly drums. Items associated with *capoeira*, such as the string and percussion instrument *berimbau* and photos of the game, also belonged to this traditional stock of ‘black objects’ which were sold, mostly to travellers, anthropologists and tourists.

Starting approximately from the fifties, what we can call ‘almost traditional’ products have also been exported. Rhythm and percussion sells, but it is generally not music played by black people that sells well in Brazil that also travels abroad. Rather, it is music which fills the niche that the international music industry has reserved for Brazilian music — usually defined as exotic, sensual and now genuine, since ‘world music’ has generated a market of its own. The Montreaux International Festival has often been the trampoline for record companies into the circuits of

world music for the Bahian music sorts that can be or accept to be configured as ‘black music’.

From the seventies onwards, three more ‘almost traditional’ products have been exported, each of which includes ‘black objects’. First, *candomblé* houses have been travelling and expanding internationally, mostly to the Rio de la Plata region (Segato 1997; Oro 1994). Second, native painting has been turned into an art form. In this development from artisan to artist, a division has developed among native painters. On the one hand, one has the ‘authentic’ artists (who created individualised and signed works of art), and on the other, the anonymous ones who produce ‘for tourists’ (supposedly replicating what the authentic artists create). Third, capoeira schools and folk dance companies have started to tour the Western world.

Last, but not least, we have the ‘new traditional’ objects. It mostly involves objects related to the Bahian carnival, which is attracting an increasing number of national and foreign tourists with its reputation of a ‘more spontaneous’ and less commercial event than the carnival in Rio. These objects — garments, musical instruments, gadgets and souvenirs — are sold everywhere. The best and, often, most expensive ones, are said to be those for sale in the boutiques of the Afro carnival association, Olodum, Ilê Ayé and Araketu. The Olodum actually set up a so-called carnival factory — a sweat-shop assembling and dyeing textiles from Bolivia into fashionable Afro objects (Nunes 1997).

AGENTS, VEHICLES AND CIRCUITS

Modern black objects reach Brazil through a variety of vehicles and agents, which have changed, especially over the last few decades. There is less state and more market than one generation ago — more commerce and cacophony. Tourism — or rather, the presentation of certain re-packaged aspects of black culture for tourists — has become an important agent. Of course, television is pivotal.

Over the last two decades, open TV channels have broadcast a number of ‘black’ series, almost all of them US-produced,

which have enjoyed large audiences. The serial *Roots* was not only the first, but also the most popular one.¹⁷ Before that, only a limited number of 'black-exploitation movies' had made it to the main Brazilian cities. For those who had no access to these movies, hair cuts and fashions could be seen, thanks to the images on record sleeves of black US bands, such as The Jackson Five. Over the last decade, home-video rentals and, even more recently, cable TV — which, as noted elsewhere in this paper, is growing, but expensive, and thus still hardly available to the lower classes — have been key vehicles of black images.¹⁸

Brazil has no specific electronic media for its black population. Except for very few temporary exceptions, there have never been radio or TV programs targeted specifically at this section of the population. Only in 1994, did (young) black people acquire media of their own. In that year, a number of new black-oriented magazines were launched. The most popular of these is the monthly *Raça Brasil*, which is said to sell up to 200,000 copies per issue, an astounding achievement by Brazilian standards.¹⁹ The era of the black underground press was thus also over. Gone was the need to resort to images of black beauty or pride on record sleeves, the occasional black American movie and the few black images seen on TV²⁰ for inspiration. Now, (young) black people have a magazine with inside information and adverts about 'black' products — such as hair products, hair cuts, cosmetics, fashions, ways of greeting each other in public (that is, 'black mimicry'), African ornaments and fabrics, etc.. Today, the symbol bank from which (young) black people can draw inspiration is much wider and more varied than just a generation ago. The problem is that access to this symbol bank is determined by money. The new black objects are usually expensive. For example, the readership of *Raça Brasil* is concentrated in the more affluent cities, rather than the regions, where the overwhelming majority of the population are black and mestizo.²¹

There are more novelties. A key one is the network of the Pastoral do Negro of the Catholic Church, a reminder of Liberation Theology. Every year, in the last few years, the progressive Catholic publisher Voles has published a Black Calendar, seen in

most parishes. The calendar conveys images of black families — proud men, kids and women in calm postures, wearing African clothing (mostly robes and turbans). It is surprisingly similar to the calendars inspired by Chance — the Afro-centric celebration of a festivity recalling Christmas. In Brazil in 1997, a number of black priests of the Pastoral do Negro attempted to introduce Kwanza from the US — deeming it the perfect African liturgy for the Christian Christmas.

Also, the networks formed by NGOs have contributed to the import and distribution throughout this huge country of a number of commoditised expressions of blackness, such as the paraphernalia of Rastafarianism and slogans such as ‘black is beautiful’ and, more recently, ‘empowerment’. Foreign foundations such as Ford, Rockefeller, Interamerican, Novib, MacArthur and Icco, which provide essential funding for very many social programs, have created a favourable *humus* for the circulation of commoditised black objects and slogans, like the ones mentioned before, by promoting identity politics in this very ‘heterophobic’ (or is it ‘ethnophobic’?) country. In fact, the agendas of these foundations, international NGOs, national NGOs and organisations of black activists are rather intertwined. All of them are interested in promoting the politics of identity — thus creating a new space for the circulation and commoditisation of black objects.²²

Yet another vehicle consists of the networks of black activists themselves, mostly regional and sometimes national, that are starting to reach abroad, thanks to three relatively new developments. First, we have the national and international networks created by the organisations of Afro-Brazilian religion and by a number of *candomblé* houses, often competing with one another. It is a status symbol for a limited number of houses to have branches in other cities and even abroad (Palmié 1994; Oro 1994). Second, a number of black Brazilians have started to travel abroad, as grantees or, more often, as ‘working ethnic tourists’. These are people who try to make it abroad by using what they see as ethnic skills — as dancers, drummers, capoeira players, etc. For them, travelling abroad is also a way to achieve status by proclaiming their blackness, as well as a means of getting to know the world.

Knowledge of the world, they assume, will give status to them when back home — in a way that recalls the *supers* who migrated to Europe from central Africa seeking to accumulate as much fashion as possible. Third, a small, but fast growing number of black Americans have been visiting Brazil. Usually, they are highly educated activists who bestow status by their sheer presence. ‘Modern blackness’ thus becomes associated with various feasts and celebrations that, in most cases, would otherwise be seen as relatively simple expressions of traditional Afro-Brazilian culture and/or non-ethnic popular Catholicism. The Boa Morte Feast in Cachoeira (Bahia) is an example. They are also present — and recognisable — in the multitudes of the Bahian carnival. These black tourists, who use the services of a small number of black Brazilian tourist agents who specialise in showing aspects of Afro-Brazilian culture to (black) tourists, carry with them ways of dressing, moving, speaking and even reasoning that attract, or even seduce a section of black Brazilians. After all, they are black AND modern, well dressed, wealthy, healthy, ‘technological’, well travelled and ethnically assertive, besides consuming conspicuously.

Today, those whom we can define as negrophiles (Gendron 1990) also contribute a lot to the making of local and not-so-local black cultures. They include a growing number of high-brow negrophiles (anthropologists, artists, intellectuals and foreigners charmed by the ‘karma’ of Bahia) as well as more vulgar negrophiles. The latter vary from white tourists, seeking strong tropical emotions through watching and sometimes partaking in Afro-Brazilian cultural or religious manifestations, to sex tourists in Bahia. This white negrophilia relates to the self-images of a part of the black population, for whom black people have more *raça* (race), *jinga* (agile heaps), *axé* (spiritual power) and *suíngue* (ability to dance). These black self-images use the notion of *baianidade* (embodying a personality that is playful as well as modern and natural), which is defined in opposition to its anti-thesis, the atmosphere of the exaggerated São Paulo of the emigrants’ stories (cold, grey, too fast, inhospitable). Mass media and advertising spread these images, decreasingly racist, and increasingly negrophile. If advertising in most Brazilian magazines is

still very elitist and hardly shows any black faces, images of black people or symbols associated with African backgrounds have burgeoned in Salvador outdoor advertising over the last five years. For example, many preventive health campaigns are in 'Afro style', some buses have been painted in 'African' colours (and a new bus company is called Axé), while black men drumming in their naked torsos have become omnipresent in general public advertising for services or commodities ranging from beer to the Bank of the State of Bahia or the main chain store.

One vehicle that is much less effective and powerful than one might expect is the music industry circuit. If few foreign bands 'do' Brazil, this is even more true of black bands and musicians. What one gets is some reggae, rap and, during specific festivals, a sprinkling of world music (such as in the Percopan percussion festival in Bahia). As I have detailed elsewhere (Sansone 1997a), it is open to discussion whether this marginality of Brazil in terms of pop music circuits is the result or the cause of the Brazilian record market's surprisingly resilience to penetration by foreign music — with the partial exception of melodic music from other Latin countries — in spite of the efforts of multinational record companies to promote foreign (mostly American) pop music. Some change, however, seem to be taking place on account of developments around 'world music', which offers a subaltern and partial centrality to the musics of the world, within which 'black musics' are widely represented, partly in the production of popular music in the First World (Martin, in press). In Salvador, thanks to the existence of a world music industry and market, musicians, impresarios and music producers maintain a growing number of contacts directly with the centres of production and commercialisation of music in the First World and, to a lesser extent, with other important centres of the Black Atlantic (primarily Jamaica), without intermediaries from Rio and São Paulo.

HIERARCHIES

In the exchange of black goods across the Black Atlantic, there is give and take as well as a hierarchy of circuits which have to be

placed in the context of a broader hierarchy of objects. In Brazil, *produtos importados* (imported goods, a slogan of much Brazilian advertising), which are more expensive, are regarded as ‘classy’ and of better quality, have a higher status than national products. An intermediate position is taken by products smuggled in through Paraguay, most of which are of East Asian origin. It is largely thanks to the smuggling, forging of trademarks and bootlegging through Paraguay that sections of the lower classes can afford some conspicuous consumption (though basic products are also smuggled in) and consume a bit of the ‘foreign world’. The popularity and high status of imported products are part of a craze that also affects ideoscapes and black symbols.

Brazil imports black objects and cultural products that have an aura of modernity — or rather, a black reinterpretation of modernity — and exports black objects and cultural products that have an aura of tradition, ‘Africa’ and even tropicalia (such as the several *mulata* shows touring abroad). Brazil is an important producer of music and choreography that are edited and packaged in many albums of world music, while the relatively small, but growing number of middle-class blacks often look to US-blacks for inspiration.

Even though the cultural exchange between black people in Latin America and black people in the Northern Hemisphere in some way involves groups that are discriminated against in both contexts, it still contains many characteristics of an unbalanced North-South exchange. Is there any South-South exchange in today’s Black Atlantic? Which channels have been offered by globalisation for horizontal exchanges? These are questions for further research. My impression is that, thus far, as seen from Brazil, globalisation hardly involves such horizontal exchanges. In fact, many ‘Southern’ commodities that reach Brazilian shores do so through a complex and far-reaching triangulation, starting their journeys in the South to reach the North and, from there, often with the increased status that the passage to the North implies, moving on again to the South. For example, ‘African’ percussion has been incorporated into Bahian Afro-pop through experiments with electronic beat boxes produced in one of the

Tigers and smuggled through Paraguay with a number of pre-recorded 'African' rhythms or beats. Another example are the rare tours of African musicians through Brazil, almost exclusively musicians based in a Northern metropolis such as Alpha Blondy, Manu Dibango and Yusouf Ndour. Basically, almost no musicians come to Brazil directly from Africa, except for a few, mostly Nigerian, state-sponsored traditional dance and music ensembles.

Little by little, this unbalanced state of affairs is starting to change on account of the general increase in international exchange and travel, and of the emergence of a more cosmopolitan Bahian cultural elite that is starting to travel and to network on its own account, although most of the contacts they create are with the North. These Bahian cosmopolitans contribute to making cities like Salvador serve as transponders in the cultural flows across the Black Atlantic, as receivers of and responders to messages.²³ Nonetheless, for the time being, Salvador maintains a peripheral position in terms of the global flows of symbols and commodities underlying international black culture. For the production and transmission centres of the majority of these symbols and commodities, Salvador belongs at the receiving end, part of the huge periphery of the Black Atlantic. These centres are situated in the anglophone world, particularly in a number of big cities (New York, London and Los Angeles), although other non-Anglophone cities, such as Amsterdam and Paris, and Kingston in Jamaica have also taken important positions (Sansone 1997).²⁴

In terms of international orientation, one sees a shift in black culture in Brazil: traditional Afro-Brazilian culture used to be relatively local, has become more internationally oriented. The sources of inspiration vary. Africa is a reference for many black intellectuals and activists as well as for a selected cohort of *candomblé* houses; the US is the reference for new middle-class blacks as well as for activists who look to the US, mostly for its politics of identity and structured black community; while Jamaica, often verbalised as 'reggae' or simply 'Bob Marley', is the main reference for a growing group of lower-class youth. Traditional Afro-Brazilian culture drew inspiration from the local context and from a mythical Africa; the new version of Afro-Brazilian culture

created by young blacks draws inspiration from a larger variety of sources, from traditional Afro-Brazilian culture as well as international black youth culture. For the young, Africa is rediscovered through the African-American route. The symbol bank upon which the new black culture is constructed is larger and more varied than ever.

CONCLUSIONS

Over the last century, one sees major shifts in the use of 'Africa' in Brazil. The 'primitive' of Africa, once to be exorcised, has acquired status in both popular as well as high-brow culture. 'Africa' has come to signify civilisation and tradition within black culture, somewhat in opposition to 'Afro', which has come to mean (merely) a lifestyle — adding an African tinge to the experience of modernity. Intellectual preferences have also shifted, from valuing syncretism and mixture to emphasising purity and originality in culture. However, what one sees is that there has been growing diversification within black culture in Brazil, firstly in terms of generation and education. The different uses of 'Africa' reflect this diversity. The new black ethnicity — based on making black culture more aesthetic, a conspicuous use of the black body, and a close relationship to youth culture and the leisure industry — lends itself to a thoroughly different attitude to the 'African' in black objects. This is one of the main reasons why globalisation has varied effects on Afro-Brazilians, and why Afro-Brazilians contribute in a variety of ways to making an international-global black culture.

A second conclusion that can be drawn is that the Black Atlantic is not just a social-cultural region, but also a battlefield, with competing actors. For a long time, the 'Africa' in Brazil — and particularly in Bahia — has intrigued travellers, social scientists, black activists and tourists from the Northern Hemisphere. Black Brazil has been particularly important in the US. It used to be a place where American black activists, and black and white social scientists sought refuge and inspiration; in more recent times, it has become the country where they tend to seek confir-

mation for the kind of identity politics that exists in the US.²⁵ Also, Europeans, particularly from France, have been attracted to black Brazil. It was only from the sixties, starting from the heyday of African decolonisation, that interest in black Brazil and actual contacts developed with Africa (e.g. Nigeria). Pivotal to the subject of this paper have been traditional and new voices from Africa; the attitudes of United States blacks; as well as traditional and new Afro-Brazilian perspectives. Much of the symbolic exchange and commoditisation of Africana across the region has, in fact, occurred within, rather than across different language areas, as well as colonial and ethnic traditions — mainly within the English zone and, to a lesser extent, the French one. Symbolic exchange across the Black Atlantic, which makes spectacular use of things African in essence, (still) reflects old colonial hierarchies as well as the new hierarchy of cultures brought about by globalisation. Popular music, but also black beauty products, are cases in question. All this make ‘re-Africanisation’ a very syncretic movement in spite of its claim of (African) purity. Further research — including a careful taxonomy of black objects across the transatlantic exchange — would certainly help us understand more about this process.

NOTES

1. In my terminology, black culture in the singular form is a basic taxonomic concept which refers to a number of common traits in the cultural production of black populations in different contexts. Black cultures in the plural refers instead to local or sub-group variants of black culture.
2. Recent historical research has made me aware that ‘black cultures’ were already being formed in Africa prior to the beginning of the trans-Atlantic slave trade, through early encounters with Catholic missionaries, or anyway along the African coast where the deportees often had to wait for years for their passages. This process of making a black culture in Africa itself has been documented, as with the invention of a Yoruba nation around the turn of the last century, which soon inspired the offspring of Africans in Cuba and Brazil (Matory 1999), and with southern equatorial Africa, which benefited from the closeness of Bantu languages (see, among others, Thornton 1998; Slenes 1995).
3. This is still a highly controversial point among historians, for an overview of the debate see Chor Maio e Ventura Santos eds. 1996.

4. I am grateful to the historian Carlos Eugênio Soares for this information.
5. In Haiti, black culture and the pantheon of voodoo deities have used a similar polarity of Guinéa — pure and dignified — versus Congo — impure and unworthy (Montilus 1993), which recalls the polarity Yoruba-Bantu in Brazil and Cuba.
6. In Salvador, these photo-books are in such great demand among tourists that they are more expensive than in Rio or Sao Paulo.
7. The Bahian version of the Afro-Brazilian religious system.
8. Some ten years later, the cultural centre Casa do Benin (House of Benin), which hosts a similar, though smaller, exhibition of photos and objects, was opened with funding from the Municipality of Salvador.
9. Some *capoeira Angola* schools in the US have been set up to cater exclusively for African-Americans and do not usually admit white participants. In Brazil, *capoeira* schools, as well as most expressions of Afro-Brazilian culture, are open to non-blacks, who are actually conspicuously present in the revival of *capoeira Angola*.
10. The number of *candomblé* houses has been growing steadily ever since it was first recorded in the thirties. Present estimates range from 200 to over 2,000. Of course, not all these houses are registered with the Federation of Afro-Brazilian Cults.
11. On the other hand, white people — often with high status positions — have their place in *candomblé*, especially as *ogan*, the social protector of the house, who participates in rituals, but does not or cannot go into a trance. Starting from as early as the thirties, re-nowned anthropologists, such as Arthur Ramos, Edson Carneiro, Pierre Verger and Roger Bastide, became *ogan*. It must be said that, in its many variants, black cultural forms in Latin America have been historically open to participation by white people under certain conditions. If white Brazilians could not be black, they could at least feel ‘African’ from time to time. It goes without saying that this bears on the nature of commoditisation of black culture, which tends to be more outward-looking in Latin America than in the US, where white people neither attempted nor were usually allowed to participate in black culture.
12. Throughout the thirties and forties, many of these intellectuals had some association with the Communist Party. In a personal communication, anthropologist Mariza Correa warned me that in the years of the Vargas military regime, the Party used *candomblé* houses and circuits to promote their activities and for recruiting.
13. In fact, according to Capone (1999), Bastide believed that the African world and the Western world were not compatible with each other and were therefore unable to mix.
14. From here on, I am drawing from my own fieldwork in the Metropolitan Region of Salvador in the years 1992-1996.
15. As a matter of fact, the fortunes of the best known contemporary painter and sculptor in Bahia, Caribé and Mario Cravo, have been based on their capacity to reproduce images and statues of *orixás* so as to make them

- accessible to a larger (and more sophisticated) audience.
16. As it can be seen and heard in the book/CD by Hill (1993).
 17. A friend of mine told me that in her middle-class school, all black boys in her classroom in those days suddenly gained the nickname Kunta Kinte, the man character of the series.
 18. Spike Lee's films, including his dramatized documentary of the One Million Man March, are often available, even in the smallest video rental stores, and have become important sources of 'information' for Brazilian black activists on US black militancy and living conditions.
 19. Other magazines have appeared since. They have mostly had a hard time surviving more than a few months, for example, the more radical *Black People* and *Negro 100%*. These new black magazines have already been the focus of documentaries by the BBC International Service and a few US TV stations.
 20. It is worth remembering that before the advent of cable TV, which started to be available from 1993, but only got popular in 1996 — after they dramatically lowered subscription rates — TV only meant open Brazilian channels — one public educational channel, with little funding, and four private networks, including the powerful Globo.
 21. The same can be said of black organisations and NGOs in general (see ISER 1988). There is no direct correlation between the percentage of black people in the total population and the degree of black organisation. In many ways, modern *negritude* is a function of relative affluence and 'modernity', rather than of demographic concentration and the strength of traditional Afro-Brazilian culture in a particular region. So, today, in the popular media, the State of Bahia and the North East in general are associated with the 'roots' of Afro-Brazilian culture, whereas the *Sul maravilha* (the marvellous and richer South East) of Sao Paulo and Rio de Janeiro is associated with modern black Brazilian culture.
 22. The internationalisation, and maybe even globalisation, of US-based perspectives on white-black relations have also contributed to the worldwide circulation of US scientific paradigms for ethnic studies; these heavily reflect a national agenda on race, and have been exported to the periphery, e.g. Brazil, with the powerful assistance of US government agencies and private foundations (Bourdieu and Wacquant 1998).
 23. For this reason, in developing a methodology for international comparison across the Black Atlantic, it might be worth focussing on cities, rather than on whole regions or nations.
 24. With regards to these black global flows, Rio differs from Salvador. Historically, Rio has had a more central position in relation to these flows. This has to do with the size of the city, its proximity to the political and economic centres of Brazil and the higher incomes which facilitates a less 'local' lifestyle and consumption pattern.
 25. On the development — over the last century — of a love-hate relationship between generations of Black American intellectuals and Brazil, see Hellwig (1990).

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