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**¡Soy Loco Por Ti América!**

**Afro-descendants in Latin America and the Caribbean – Diaspora, Identity, Creativity  
and Citizenship under the Myth of Racial Democracy**

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¡Soy Loco Por Ti América! : Afro-descendants in Latin America and the Caribbean – Diaspora, Identity, Creativity and Citizenship under the Myth of Racial Democracy © 2023 by Félix Ayoh'OMIDIRE is licensed under CC BY 4.0. To view a copy of this license, visit <http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/>

### **Abstract**

Researchers have identified two distinct categories of the African Diaspora which must be analysed using different parameters. The first is the Historic Diaspora of African peoples occasioned by the Trans-Atlantic Slavery and its correlates such as the exploitation of African men, women and children sequestered from Africa as enslaved populations and indentured labourers in the Americas. This systematic diasporisation of Africans lasted from the 16<sup>th</sup> to the 19<sup>th</sup> Centuries and resulted in what is today considered the Afro-descendant populations of modern day nations of Latin America and the Caribbean, including the USA. The second category is the product of a more recent phenomenon which has been described as the economic diasporisation of African peoples through a sporadic self exile towards the Global North in quest of better living conditions. A major difference between the two categories is the fact that members of the Economic Diaspora group maintain an open and constant access to their African homeland. In fact, they continue to preserve concrete kinship, ethnic and national links with the country of their African nationality. They participate in the daily life of the nation including via the social media, and are looked upon as real or potential benefactors by the loved ones left behind on the continent thanks to their foreign currency remittances to family and friends back home. Furthermore, they continue to fulfil civic responsibilities such as participation in electoral processes in their home country. Conversely, members of the Historic African Diaspora located in the Americas are deprived of such intimate relationship with Africa because of the historic disconnection with any specific location in Africa occasioned by the systematic rupture of their direct kinship ties with Africa. Indeed, it is virtually impossible to trace their Roots in Africa to any specific lineage, location or nationality in contemporary Africa. This is what makes the “afro” in the identity of Afro-Brazilians, Afro-Columbians or Afro-Puerto-Ricans, etc. only a symbolic belonging because their citizenship of Africa is at best imagined and lived out without the possibility of carrying the passport of any African state as an inheritance from their direct parents or grand-parents. This Inaugural Lecture is an appraisal of the travails and the process of afro-identity construction by the members of the Historic African Diaspora who, today, make up the Afro-descendant populations of the thirty-three nations comprising the Latin American and Caribbean regions. Ultimately, the Lecture interrogates the *long durée* of their quest for full citizenship rights and privileges in modern Latin-American and Caribbean countries such as Brazil, Cuba, Colombia, Trinidad and Tobago, the Dominican Republic, Puerto-Rico, Mexico, Venezuela, etc.

**Keywords:** African Diaspora, Afro-descendance, Racial Democracy, Afro-Latin Identity

## Zusammenfassung

Wissenschaftler\*innen haben zwei unterschiedliche Kategorien der afrikanischen Diaspora identifiziert. Um diese zu analysieren, bedarf es den Gebrauch verschiedener Parameter. Bei der ersten handelt es sich um die Historische Diaspora aus Afrika stammender Menschen, die aus dem transatlantischen Sklavenhandel und seinen ‚Begleiterscheinungen‘ - wie die Ausbeutung afrikanischer Männer, Frauen und Kinder, die aus Afrika als versklavte Population und als Zwangsarbeiter nach Amerika verschleppt wurden - hervorging. Diese systematische Diasporisierung erstreckte sich über einen Zeitraum vom 16. bis hin zum 19. Jahrhundert und führte zu dem, was heute als afronachkommende Bevölkerung der heutigen Nationen Lateinamerikas und der Karibik, einschließlich den USA bezeichnet wird. Die zweite Kategorie ist das Ergebnis eines neueren Phänomens, das als Wirtschaftliche Diasporisierung von Menschen afrikanischer Herkunft beschrieben wird, die auf der Suche nach besseren Lebensbedingungen vereinzelt ins selbst gewählte Exil in den Globalen Norden gehen. Ein hauptsächlichlicher Unterschied zwischen beiden Kategorien ist der Fakt, dass Mitglieder\*innen der wirtschaftlichen Diaspora Gruppe eine offene und konstante Beziehung zu ihrer afrikanischen Heimat aufrechterhalten. So pflegen sie weiterhin konkrete Verwandtschafts-, ethnische und nationale Bindungen mit dem Land, dessen afrikanische Nationalität sie haben. Sie nehmen am täglichen Leben der Nation, einschließlich durch soziale Medien, teil. Zudem werden sie von den, auf dem Kontinent zurückgebliebenen Angehörigen, aufgrund ihrer Fremdwährungsüberweisungen an Familie und Freunde in der Heimat, als reale oder potenzielle Wohltäter\*innen angesehen. Außerdem erfüllen sie weiterhin bürgerschaftliche Verantwortung, wie die Teilnahme am Wahlprozess in ihren Heimatländern. Umgekehrt sind Mitglieder\*innen der historischen afrikanischen Diaspora in den Amerikas so einer engen Beziehung zu Afrika beraubt. Grund dafür ist die historische Trennung von einem bestimmten Ort in Afrika, welcher durch den systematischen Abbruch ihrer Verwandtschaftsbeziehungen zu Afrika verursacht wurde. In der Tat ist es virtuell unmöglich ihre Wurzeln zu einer bestimmten Abstammung, einem bestimmten Ort oder Nationalität im gegenwärtigen Afrika zurückzuverfolgen. Daher ist das Wort „Afro“ in der Identität der Afrobrasilianer\*innen, Afrokolumbianer\*innen oder Afro-Puerto Ricaner\*innen, usw. nur zu einer symbolischen Zugehörigkeit, denn ihre afrikanische Nationalität ist bestenfalls vorgestellt oder ausgelebt, ohne dass die Möglichkeit besteht, den Pass eines afrikanischen Staates als Erbe ihrer direkten Eltern oder Großeltern mitzuführen. Diese Antrittsvorlesung ist eine Einschätzung der Mühen und des Prozesses der Konstruktion einer Afroidentität durch die Mitglieder\*innen der historischen afrikanischen Diaspora, welche heute die afronachkommende Bevölkerung der dreiunddreißig Nationen umfassend der lateinamerikanischen und karibischen Regionen ausmacht. Schlussendlich hinterfragt diese Vorlesung die *long durée* ihres Strebens nach vollen und kompletten Staatsbürgerechten und -privilegien im modernen lateinamerikanischen und karibischen Ländern, wie Brasilien, Kuba, Kolumbien, Trinidad und Tobago, die Dominikanische Republik, Puerto-Rico, Mexiko, Venezuela, usw.

**Schlagwörter:** afrikanische Diaspora, Afro-Abstammung, „Rassendemokratie“, afro-lateinamerikanische Identität

## Introito

Soy loco por ti, América  
Yo voy traer una mujer playera  
Que su nombre sea Marti  
Que su nombre sea Marti...

Loco por ti de amores  
Tenga como colores  
La espuma blanca de  
Latinoamérica  
Y el cielo como bandera  
Y el cielo como bandera

Loco por ti, América  
Soy loco por ti de amores  
Soy loco por ti, América  
Loco por ti de amores

Como se chama a amante  
Deste país sem nome  
Este tango, este rancho  
Este povo, dizei-me então  
Arde o fogo de conhecê-la  
O fogo de conhecê-la

El nombre del hombre muerto  
Antes que a definitiva noite  
Se espalhe em Latinoamérica  
El nombre del hombre es pueblo  
El nombre del hombre es pueblo

Loco por ti  
Loco por ti  
Loco por ti  
Loco por ti de amores

(Caetano Veloso, *Soy loco por ti, América*, 1968)

### 1.0. Introduction

#### *¡Soy Loco Por Ti América!*

America, the so-called New World, came into existence as an entity disputed from all sides. One daresay, as a bride coveted by three avid husbands (apologies to Cameroonian playwright - Guillaume Oyono-Mbia, and his *trois prétendants, um mari*)<sup>1</sup>. The song chosen as our epigraph for this lecture - “¡Soy Loco Por Ti América!” - can therefore be read as a declaration of “unconditional”(?) love for this highly charming and well-endowed bride by any one, or all, of

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<sup>1</sup> Éditions CLE, Cameroun, 1964.

the three suitors representing the three distinct human “racial”(?) groups that the history of European-provoked Modernity brought together on the American continent with the fateful arrival of the Spaniard Don Cristóbal Colón, and the ensuing “colón-nisation” of this vast expanse of land with everything it encompasses and represents. However, as I have had cause to argue in a previous essay about the systematic elimination of the original husband, the Amerindian subject who was consumed too quickly by the aggressive mechanism of the European colonisation of his bride, the music must be read from the point of view of the two remaining suitors, making the drama even more balanced and resolved beyond the Amadian ode to miscegenation that is the only condition capable of producing and sustaining a love triangle of the type unapologetically celebrated by *Dona Flor and Her Two Husbands*<sup>2</sup>.

Apparently, right from the onset, the two surviving husbands of this *latiníssima* Dona Flor, as projected in the Modernist literature of Jorge Amado, are each allowed to only access her beauty, her wealth and her charms in an eternally furtive arrangement where each one lays his claims and marks his territory in defiance and obvious rejection of the fundamental monogamic laws of “two is company, three is a crowd”, which they, like the two husbands of Dona Flor, can only subvert if each manages to keep to his “divinely” assigned space and time as a *sine qua non* to maintain the precarious harmony of an illusory Racial Democracy.

Thus, on the one hand we have the white husband, the *Ouropeano*<sup>3</sup> suitor who represents the *ego conquistador* per excellence of this luscious bride and who proceeded to completely ravage and consume her in his quest for the *el dorado* (the land of gold), thus projecting on the entire continent from north to south his pecuniary and profit-driven love blatantly and unashamedly proclaimed everywhere as evident in the *pesos*-sounding<sup>4</sup>, materialistic names he gave, not only to the different countries - Argentina, Brazil, Mexico, Panamá, Cuba, Puerto Rico, Costa Rica, Venezuela, etc - but also to the key localities of the region - La Plata (Argentina), Cobre (Cuba), Valparaiso (Chile), Cartagena de las Indias (Colombia), Punta Cana (Dominican Republic), and Caracas (Venezuela) to mention just a few - all names that evoke the most

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<sup>2</sup> Cf. Jorge Amado's 1966, novel. *Dona Flor e seus dois maridos*. Rio de Janeiro: Companhia das Letras,

<sup>3</sup> Cf. Ayoh'OMIDIRE, 2010 – Caramuru, Globalization and the Identity Discourse in Latin America ...

<sup>4</sup> *Pesos* is the original name of the Spanish monetary unit established as legal tender throughout the Spanish-speaking world from Spain to places as distinct and distant as the Phillipines in Asia and Equatorial Guinea in West-central Africa. In Hispanic America the name peso continues to be used by Argentina, Chile, Colombia, Cuba, Dominican Republic, Mexico and Uruguay. Its literal translation as “weight” leaves no one in doubt as to its intimate association with the precious stones such as gold, silver and copper which the Spanish crown mined in abundance from its colonized territories. As it is, their Portuguese cousins were not left behind in any way, judging by the names of diverse locales in Brazil such as *Ouro preto* (black gold), Chapada Diamantina, Minas Gerais

precious wealth of natural and mineral resources that are the veritable *raison d'être* of this love affair - silver, gold, copper, export wood, luscious flora and exotic fauna and every other trappings capable of sustaining an insatiable passion.

The alter-ego of this European suitor of Latin America is no other than the marooned African and his Creole descendants who, out of the sheer will to survive in the inglorious condition of the uprooted and enslaved subject, must transform himself into that *Buffalo soldier*, *dreadlock rasta* of the legendary Bob Marley in order to catch the eye of that beloved America and gain a minimal access to her opulent caress so jealously protected by the European gatekeepers and their white descendants over the past five centuries.

Thus can one read Caetano's *declaração de amor*<sup>5</sup> (soy loco por ti América!) as the "ironic" (?) yearnings of the African suitor who was forced into this love triangle by the inexorable hands of history as the one whose hands, sweat and blood will fertilise this virgin continent to make it yield its most promising and precious harvests. Even if one argues, as one is wont to do, that the African subject, uprooted so violently from his own version of the Old World to forcefully populate and help domesticate this New World, would naturally be blind to the alluring beauty of his forced exile, at least his Creole offspring, born and bred in the Americas, would certainly qualify as a contending suitor for the heart of this voluptuous bride. However, since the dialectics of power relations in this love affairs of the American tropics make of the Afro-descendant the underprivileged, albeit the proverbially over-endowed suitor, who must outdo his rival by all means in this tango of unequal prowess, *macht* and talent without the privilege of having his exploits appreciated, and at the constant risk of being summarily eliminated, he becomes a more fascinating subject in his natural vocation to douse and diffuse the overbearing hubris of the White Other, which has constantly sought to pulverise his very presence and essence.

In this Inaugural Lecture, my intention is to problematise the insertion of the Afro-descendant subject within the national polities that make up the diverse Latin-American and Caribbean nations. I intend to do this by adopting what I call the dramatic cycles or episodes of re-existence, using the metaphor of the Telenovelas or television soap operas which have come to represent the ultimate iconographic projection of the region within the global media space. Episode One will focus on the origin of Afro-descendant populations in the region with specific reference to the Trans-Atlantic Slavery. Episode Two will look at the cycle of resistance and

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<sup>5</sup> Declaration of love.

the eventual Abolition of Slavery, considering how that moment impacted on the fate of Afro-descendant populations in their quest for citizenship. This episode will specifically analyse what can be called the mortal 'hide-and-seek' game between the Afro-descendant populations and the ruling white elites of the newly constituted Republics in Latin America and the Caribbean, touching on touchy issues such as programmatic genocide, institutional racism, social ostracism, and economic dis-empowerment schemes invented by the respective states in their bid to rid their national landscapes of the ubiquitous presence of Afro-descendants. Episode Three will focus on the resistance and strategies developed by the Afro-descendants to side-step such racial booby-traps by re-inventing their identity through impactful agency in the cultural and creative domains as a way of demonstrating their relevance within the nations, thereby getting a chance to renegotiate their citizenship. Since we intend to make of this a three-act play, if time and space permit, this last episode will ultimately focus on the ever-expanding dialogue between the Africas of the Afro-Latin-American subjects and the home continent of Africa as well as their impact on the global perception of Afro-identities in the contemporary world.

## **EPISODE ONE: From Africa to the Diaspora - the Painful Exodus**

### **1.1. Defining the African Diaspora**

When it comes to unearthing the myths that projected and sustained the image and presence of the African and his Creole<sup>6</sup> descendants in the American space, one is predictably forced to look at the history of slavery and enslavement in the infamous trans-Atlantic Slave Trade which took place between the 16<sup>th</sup> and the 19<sup>th</sup> century, although there have been records of people of African descent living on the American continent before Columbus. Nevertheless, the history of the African past in the Americas is generally stepped in deliberate obscurantism in most academic discourse probably due to the burden of guilt that is associated with the history of how millions of men, women, and children were literally uprooted from their natural habitat and drafted out of the African continent in a uni-directional trajectory which ended up transplanting them and their collective essence into the so-called New World. The myth of the African presence in the American Diaspora is therefore intimately tied to the myth of the African past in the major Euro-American discourse fields such as History, Philosophy,

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<sup>6</sup> Here and elsewhere in this lecture, the term Creole is used as referring to the descendants of Africans enslaved in the Americas whose identity is defined by his adaptation to and modification of his milieu through a creative manipulation of his hybrid space and fortunes. Theoretically, my use of the term aligns with the ideas foregrounded by such great Caribbean thinkers of *créolité* and *créolitude* such as Jean-Price Mars, Édouard Glissant, Patrick Chamoiseau, and Raphael Confiant, among others.



Anthropology and Sociology. This is essentially a series of negationist accounts about the very (lack of) humanity of Africans covering such diverse strata as history, culture, civilisation, values, sentiments, religion, philosophy, beauty, literature, art, music, memory, science and technology, etc. One need not repeat here the sophisticated arguments and epistemological discourses deployed by diverse Eurocentric philosophers, political scientists, sociologists, historians and writers based on wild conjectural sciences ranging from the Darwinian evolutionary theories, to August Comte's Positivism, and the more recent developmental theories concerning the difficulties of inscribing Africa and its people into the universal history and praxis of development and the eventual coinage of the *failed-state*-syndrome.

Evidently, the bitter-sweet love of the Afro-descendant Creole for his Latin-American and Caribbean bride, with all the pains, burdens and responsibilities that the 500 years of history of slavery and colonisation have fostered on him cannot but intrigue anyone who is minimally familiar with the enormous odds that Afro-descendant subjects have had to face in their quest for citizenship within the different political constructs that represent the contemporary nations of Latin America and the Caribbean. The intent of this Inaugural Lecture is therefore to interrogate and problematise the sustained quest for identity and full citizenship rights by Afro-Latin-American and Caribbean subjects against the irresistibly seductive background of the myth of racial democracy which has been a constant trope in the discourse on national identity in the region as a whole.

By way of situating the research population, it is absolutely necessary to define and delimit its spatial and temporal scope. Some pertinent questions that will definitely be of interest here are:

1. Who are the subjects African Diaspora Studies?
2. What qualifies one to be an African Diaspora subject?
3. What are the characteristics of being an African Diaspora subject?
4. What are the challenges, myths and realities?

Ultimately, one would be tempted to add to this sequence the question of the significance of endowing a chair of African Diaspora Studies in a Department of African Literatures and Cultures in the very heart of Europe such as the one we have at the Humboldt University at this moment which ultimately avails me this singular and felicitous privilege of delivering my professorial Inaugural Lecture here in Berlin.

If one may begin with the last question, the justification for endowing a chair for African Diaspora Studies at the Institute for Asian and African Studies of this prestigious University is

not far-fetched. The Yoruba people of West Africa have a proverb which goes thus: “*Okùn kò ní gùn, gùn, gùn, kómá ni ibi a ti fàá wá*”, which can be roughly translated as: No matter how long a rope grows, it must have a point of origin. In other words, it is impossible to evoke the memory of the African Diaspora without invoking the movement and flow out of Africa as a representation of its extended presence in time in space. The flip-side of the old aphorism we were taught in the earliest classes of the History of Africa in those days which affirms that “Africa without Madagascar is incomplete” is eloquently borne out by the 2008 resolution of the African Union which proclaimed that henceforth, the African Diaspora will be accorded the status of the sixth region of Africa. In the enabling documents of this declaration, it specifically recognised the African Diaspora as a movement epitomized by the mass dispersion of peoples from Africa during the Transatlantic Slave Trade, from the 1500s to the 1800s which took millions of people from Western and Central Africa to different regions throughout the Americas and the Caribbean.

Thus, was constituted the historic diaspora umbilically and irrevocably connected to the continent of Africa through slavery and its attendant movements, including the movement of emancipated Africans as indentured workers into Caribbean locales such as Trinidad, Jamaica, Antigua and Barbados, Sta. Lucia, St. Vincent and the Grenadines, Aruba, Belize, etc. from the mid to late 19<sup>th</sup> century.

In essence, the descendants of those victims of the obnoxious slave trade who today constitute the Afro-descendant communities in countries such as Argentina, Aruba, Belize, Bolivia, Brazil, Chile, Colombia, Costa Rica, Cuba, Dominican Republic, Ecuador, El Salvador, Guatemala, Haiti, Honduras, Jamaica, Panama, Paraguay, Peru, Puerto Rico, Mexico, Nicaragua, Trinidad and Tobago, Uruguay, and Venezuela, including, of course, the Afro-descendant populations in the USA, as well as the greater and lesser Antillean regions with countries like Barbados, Guadeloupe, Martinique, St. Kitts, Sta. Lucia and Dominica, St. Vincent, etc. are the direct subjects of African Diaspora Studies. They form what is referred to as the primary African diaspora societies in the Modern world. Incidentally, because of the particularities of the linguistic and predominantly Catholic heritage that links such societies to restricted areas of the Old World overshadowed by the legacy of the *Península Ibérica*, this above-mentioned African diaspora in the Americas has found itself compartmentalised under the generic label of Latin America as a marker of its distinction from the Protestant ethos of the other Americas generally classified as the Global North. Over the course of the last century, this primary diaspora has successfully produced a secondary diaspora in the Global North, replicating itself in places like

the USA and Canada, as well as in diverse locations on the European continent. Thus, the late Jamaican-born Afro-British cultural studies theorist, Stuart Hall (1932 - 2014), spoke of what he termed the paradox of the double diaspora which took him and his generation to the United Kingdom on a reverse triangular trajectory: Africa-Caribbean-Europe. In terms of identity, the same Stuart Hall made it categorically clear that theirs must be a “hyphenated” identity per force, with the prefix “Afro” serving as the primordial marker and common denominator irrespective of the routes taken to arrive at their new citizenship status as Afro-Colombian, Afro-Brazilian, Afro-American or even Afro-European (now stylishly referred to as Afropean in contemporary discourse).

Indeed, it was the principle of automatic identification of every citizen of any of the above-mentioned modern nations whose ancestry is African as an African Diaspora subject<sup>7</sup> which makes it possible to claim that a country like Brazil, with its 230 million population, of which more than half (59%) are of African descent, has the second largest population of African people, narrowly losing the first place to Nigeria with its over 210-million strong black population, and being followed closely by countries like the United States of America, and Colombia respectively.

However, it would be theoretically wrong to limit the definition of African Diaspora subjects within those societies to this category alone, notwithstanding the very complex barometers evolved over time to determine in those countries who indeed is an Afro-descendant, since, in the case of Brazil, and as emulated by a few other countries, it is actually the rule of *auto-declaração* (self-declaration) as black which is recognised by law as the defining factor of one's racial identity, irrespective of actual genetic and phenotype traits and physical coloration. A 2021 study by PAHO (Pan-American Health Organization) put the total population in Latin America at 134 million people of individuals who identify themselves as Afro-descendants<sup>8</sup> while George Reid Andrews, a Distinguished Professor of History at Pittsburg University, and author of *Afro-Latin America: Black Lives, 1600-2000* (Harvard University Press, 2016) basing his statistics on the most recent national census by governments across the region, had actually

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<sup>7</sup> A recent study tries to give some statistics on countries with significant African, Mulatto, or Zambo populations as follows: Brazil (54 million, if including the pardo Brazilian population with Mulatto phenotype), Haiti (8.7 million), Dominican Republic (8.5 million), Cuba (7 million), Colombia (5 million), Venezuela (4 million), Puerto Rico (1.8 million), and Ecuador (1.1 million).

<sup>8</sup> Cf. <https://www.paho.org/en/news/3-12-2021-afro-descendants-latin-american-countries-live-starkly-unequal-conditions-impact>

put the total population of Afro-Latin-American subjects at between 135 and 140 million: “most of whom (97 million) live in Brazil. Another 15 million (live) in Venezuela, and 8 million in the Dominican Republic” (2018 pg. 9).

As we shall have cause to discuss further on in this Lecture, it is possible today to arrive at such convincing statistics on the enormous demographic strength of Afro-descendants in Latin America and the Caribbean thanks to the culminating effects of the struggle for a unified racial classification by Black Movements in the region since the turn of the last century, leading to the unified recognition of the scores of racial-subgroups of African descendants hitherto distinguished since Slavery and the colonial period under different categories such as *preto*, *pardo*, *mulatto*, *moreno*, *mameluco*, *jambo*, *negro*, *cafuzo*, *garifuna*, *cimarrón*, *zambo*, etc. Terms which disguised their common denominator as people of African descent by laying emphasis on their different ‘colorations’ along the black-white racial spectrum. In Brazil alone, studies have demonstrated that there were up to 32 different colour categories, including such funny categories as “*formiga*” (ants’ colour), *sarará* (*cock-red*), *cabo verde* (Cape Verde), *café-com-leite* (coffee with milk), etc. In Mexico, on the other hand, where regions like Veracruz, Campeche, Pánuco and Acapulco have been recognised as centres of distribution and irradiation of Afro-descendant presence and identity, reports have unearthed such official ethnic references as *jarocho* (wild pig), and *lobo* (wolf) to describe the subject born of the miscegenation of Africans with Mexican Amerindians.

To further problematise the situation, as we shall have cause to demonstrate, cognisance must be taken of the sociological ascription of Afro-Diaspora identity to individuals of non-African biological ancestry who have subscribed to the symbolic citizenship of the Afro-Diaspora “nations”<sup>9</sup> through the bias of religious and cultural affiliation which may or may not have involved initiation into African-derived religious traditions such as Santería in Cuba, Candomblé and its many facets in Brazil, Sango in Trinidad, Vaudou in Haiti, etc.

Therefore, as a way of responding to the second question of what qualifies one to the global citizenship as an African Diaspora subject, one must look beyond biology, genetics and phenotype. Moreso that today, the global space of African-derived religions and other Afro-

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<sup>9</sup> The notion being evoked here is that of the *nações* or *nación* associated with African mythical places of origin in the major Afro-Latin Religions such as Candomblé, Santería, Trinidadian Sango, Haitian Vaudou, etc. Thus the nations here are conceived along the lines of the Cuban *Cabildos de nación* with its predominant Lucumí, Arará, Congo and Abacua nations as well as the fluid identities of the *nações* de Candomblé where, for example, the same ethnic identity on the African continent such as the Yoruba nation will yield tens, if not scores of *nações* such as *nagô*, *nupe*, *efã*, *ijexá*, *queto* (*ketu*), *savalu*, and even *muçurumi* (muslim).

Diaspora cultural practices such as Rastafarianism, Capoeira, Maracatu, Jongo, etc. are now awash with individuals of *Arian* (as well as Asian) ancestry who more than gladly accept the etiquette of “*Gallus Africanus est!*” which was once flung in the face of French-sociologist Roger Bastide in the course of his passionate research within Afro-Brazilian religious traditions<sup>10</sup>.

As far as the characteristics of African Diaspora subjects are concerned, one can advance a long list of attributes ranging from adoption of African or African-derived names, dressing mode, and hairdo to more profound personal choices such as preferences in religious and philosophical outlook, membership of, and initiation into the priesthood of one, or several Afro-Latin religions such *Santería*, *Candomblé*, *Vaudou*, *Shango*, etc. The list must definitely also include preference for African-derived musical genres, especially those associated with Afro-Latin religious traditions in the Diaspora such as Samba, Rumba, Calypso, Son, Salsa, Merengue, Chá-Chá-Chá, Soca, Reggae, and the *carnivalissimo* Axé-music of Bahia. The self-identification may also involve some preferences in eating habits where, in the case of Brazil one readily thinks of the ubiquitous *Acarajé da Bahia* and its spicy cousins like *abará*, *caruru*, *bobo de camarão*, as well as the Cuban yuca and ñame, Above all, the urge to learn an African language and the dream of visiting Africa are two other indispensable characteristics.

Having tried so far to locate the Afro-descendant subject within the Latin-American and Caribbean horizon, our next effort is to verify what it really means to be an Afro-descendant in those societies today. Our next round of research questions can thus be framed as follows:

1. What does it mean to be Black in Latin America and the Caribbean – Afro-Brazilian, Afro-Argentinian, Afro-Peruvian, Afro-Venezuelan, etc?
2. What are the advantages and perils of claiming such an identity in present day Latin America and the Caribbean?
3. What are the obstacles to the realisation of full political, economic, social, religious, ideological and epistemological fulfillment by Afro-descendants in Latin America and the Caribbean in their quest for full citizenship rights and privileges within their respective countries?
4. What is the posture of Afro-descendants in Latin-American and Caribbean countries to the nations and notions of Africa?

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<sup>10</sup> Cf. Marcio Goldman “Reading Roger Bastide: Deutero-Learning The African Religions In Brazil”. *Études rurales* , juillet-décembre 2015, No. 196, Multiplicités anthropologiques au Brésil: Varia (juillet-décembre 2015), pp. 9-24 & Capone, 2010.

As simple as it may appear at first sight, our first question is probably the most complex to answer in the series of research questions sketched above. History has demonstrated how long and arduous the journey to self-identification has been for millions of Afro-descendants. Judging from the not-too-cheerful statistics on matters of human and citizen's rights, political and economic empowerment, educational achievements and social equality which characterize the Afro-Latin-American populations, it becomes evident that the burden of the slave past continues to weigh rather inexorably against the felicity of Afro-Latin-Americans subjects, most especially those whose "Afro-ness" is more visible through their phenotype (skin colour, hair, lips, hips and nose shapes).

While it is true that the treatment does differ from one society to another, the overall quotient can be argued to be a generally negative reception or rather poor or non-inclusion of the millions of Afro-descendants in the national projects of virtually all those Latin-American and Caribbean countries where they represent a distinctive ethnic and racial category. Our next Episode in this series will thus focus on this painful reality with distressing perspectives for Afro-descendants in contemporary Latin-American and Caribbean nations.

## **EPISODE TWO: The Myths and Fables of Afro-Rejection**

### **2.0. Racial Democracy and Afro-descendant Identity Politics in Latin American and Caribbean Societies - Fleeing Blackness in the Tropes of *Embraquecimento* and *Mestizaje***

Theoretically, the trauma of slavery has always been a pervasive presence in the collective psyche of all the countries born out of slavery. In Latin American and Caribbean societies, research has shown that both the enslaved Black populations and their Creole descendants who were the victims of chattel slavery on the one hand, as well as the enslaving white population and their descendants on the other hand, have always suffered the trauma of this prolonged violence. While the enslaved populations were made to feel an acute loss of their humanity right from the moment of enslavement as attested to by the metaphor of the legendary tree of forgetfulness or *l'arbre de l'oubli* purportedly located on the final stretch between the solid African ground and the shifting bellies of the *tumberos* (slave ships), and around which the enslaved individuals were made to circle a number of times before being forced into the agonies of the Middle Passage through the enigmatic *Door of No Return* which is supposed to seal perpetually their fate as dehumanised properties of their enslavers, research has shown that the latter themselves were never impervious to the curses proffered by their victims during such rituals and the subsequent ordeal of their daily existence within the charged atmosphere of

slave-master relationship in the Americas which ultimately puts the lie to Gilberto Freyre's lusotropicalist fantasies of the harmonious existence in the Americas between the *Casa Grande* and the *Senzala*<sup>11</sup>.

Indeed, right from the moment the enslavers purported to take away the divinely ordained and freely accorded freedom of a fellow human being, the only logical relationship that can exist between both parties can best be described by the Yoruba proverb: “*Ikú ndẹ̀ Dẹ̀dẹ̀, Dẹ̀dẹ̀ náà ndẹ̀kú!*” (As Death is stalking Dede, Dede too is busy setting traps to ensnare Death). The ensuing scenario is therefore a generalised and constant malaise that can be inferred from the highly charged imagery of yet another Yoruba proverb: *Adiyẹ̀ bà l'ókùn, ara ò rokùn, ara ò ràdiyẹ̀!* (when a chicken perches on a rope, neither the chicken nor the rope can experience stability). Thus, Slavery as an institution, was obviously a recipe for constant violence on both sides, and either side of the contending actors of this deadly drama could be at the receiving end of violence at any moment, although the might that appears to have been on the side of the enslavers may have given them a better sense of security than the enslaved who had to endure the constant dehumanisation and perpetual denial of this other body that daily barraged his emotive and physical psyche with the ultimate objective of convincing him that he could only have been “less human”, to have found himself in such a hopeless situation.

This psychological trauma, coupled with the systematic and institutionalised theory and praxis of racism deployed on a daily basis from every conceivable platform – from the church pulpit to the courtroom, from the anthropological classroom to the medical laboratories – loaded with seemingly irrefutable proofs of his divine guilt and rejection as an aberration of the human family whose every trait attests to his having fallen out of grace with the creator cannot but wear out the enslaved Black individual and his descendants who would, at some point, begin to be convinced of adduced genetic flaws that justify their deplorable existence. That stage however must have marked the optimum point in the dialectics of a slave existence leaving him with either of two options: either to loath himself forever and fall irretrievably into despair, or to seek and chart a path to auto-recovery as a way of re-negotiating his humanity. While the

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<sup>11</sup> Gilberto Freyre, 20<sup>th</sup> century Brazilian sociologist published his seminal work *Casa Grande e Senzala* in 1934. Translated as *Masters and Slaves* (*Herrenhaus und Sklavenhütte* in the German translation) the work would lend itself to the Portuguese myth of Lusotropicalism which attributes to the Portuguese an almost divinely-ordained position as the only European nation destined to thrive in the tropics. However, the most problematic aspects of Freyre's theory was that which deals with the purported humanity of the Slavery institution under the Portuguese. He claims that, in comparison to other European slave holders, the Portuguese did not dehumanize their enslaved population but actually related to them in a more humane context where a series of mechanisms such as the *apadrinhamento* (god-fatherism) of the children of the enslaved Africans (most of whom were fathered in the first place by the Portuguese enslavers) qualifies such *afilhados* (god-children) and their mothers, to a less harsh treatment, thereby not only shortening the allegorical social distance between the *Casa Grande* (Slave Master's quarters) and the *Senzala* (the dungeon abode of the enslaved populations).

first option leads to hopelessness and blind, often self-destructive impulses and acts such as self-denial, wanton destruction and violence towards oneself and others, homicide, and even suicide in a desperate attitude that Afro-American literary critic Henry Louis Gates Jr would describe as “fleeing blackness”, the second option, which, by the way, is not less violent, but has the advantage of purposeful insight at self-redemption which would eventually lead him on the path to self-recovery.

Whereas the despair of the first option is readily evident in the unconditional rejection and denial of the self which would make the Black subject to aspire to whiteness as a redeeming ploy in what Fanon would describe as *black skin, white mask* with the attending agony associated with what Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guatarri refer to as the *simulacro* and his frustrated ego, the arduous reverse journey of self-discovery would eventually lead the Black subject back to his essence and give him the opportunity to come to terms with his humanity and, eventually treat himself to the luxury of some cultural narcissism even to the point, as we have seen in the music of our epigraph, of proclaiming a passionate love for the very land which has seen him so humiliated: ¡Soy loco por ti América!.

António Carlos dos Santos, the famous “*Vovô do Ilê*”, co-founder and life President of one of Brazil’s most vibrant Afro-cultural and black carnival groups, *Ilê Aiyê*, makes this clear in his reminiscence of the early days of this emblematic *bloco Afro* in Salvador in 1974 Salvador, the Black Rome of Brazil and the entire Afro-America:

*Aqui na Liberdade havia um grande número de pessoas que não assumia a sua negritude, as pessoas se diziam morenos, marrons glacês e outras denominações meio estranhas. Com o surgimento do Ilê Aiyê, começou essa transformação aqui na Liberdade: houve uma mudança no comportamento das pessoas, na maneira de se vestir e arrumar o cabelo... (SODRÉ, 2014, pg. 12)*

(Back then in this district of Liberdade where we live, a good number would never claim their blackness. Many preferred to call themselves morenos (light-skinned), *marron glacês* (icy brown) and other funny colours. However, the birth of *Ilê Aiyê* changed all that. One could see the transformation here in Liberdade: there was a complete change in people’s behaviour which was visible in their way of dressing, makeup, and hairdo...) <sup>12</sup>

The history of the *longue durée* with reference to the posture of the enslaved Black populations and their descendants in Latin America and the Caribbean has demonstrated that, contrary to the expectations eternally projected onto the collective psyche of the enslavers, the enslaved did

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<sup>12</sup> Here and elsewhere in this Lecture, except otherwise stated, all translations are mine.



not lose their humanity nor their ethnic memory at the tree of forgetfulness. Instead, at the most convenient or even inconvenient opportunities, they retrieved and fell back on their ethnic memory to process, negotiate and navigate the situations of their enslaved condition.

That was the whole essence of the structural and structured re-grouping and reformulation of the ethnic and racial organizations among the Black populations which gave rise to their participation in various domestication and creolization processes such as the Black Brotherhood associations within the Catholic Church known as *Irmandades Negras* in Brazil, and the *Cabildos de Nación* in Cuba which would eventually permit some form of recuperation of the African family structure albeit as a ritualised family which would come to be valued above their sequestered blood or biological family lines when they eventually resolve to re-invent their umbilical links to Africa through initiation into African-inspired religious traditions known today as Candomblé, Santería, Rastafarianism, etc. This recovered family would permit for bonding on a metonymic level within the enslaved communities – professional, economic (mutual aids), political, cultural, moral, sexual and religious.

Of course, the enslavers were not oblivious to such strategies of rapprochement on the part of the enslaved. Extant historical records show initial resistance which would gradually evolve into partial tolerance under the relentless assault from the enslaved population. That was what created the opportunities for a kind of minimal dialogue between the two racial groups in Latin American and Caribbean societies where the enslaver class was largely attached to the generous traditions of popular Catholicism imported from the Iberian Peninsula. Such dialogues transformed into the *apadrinhamento* patterns that, as we have seen earlier, would encourage scholars like Gilberto Freyre to consider the history of the formation of the Afro-Latin American and Caribbean societies under the prism of some form of racial cordiality whereby the enslavers were not only “liberal” enough to procreate *en masse* with the enslaved womenfolk but were also ‘magnanimous’ enough to accept to be godparents to the latter’s black and mulatto children. And, that, in its simplest essence, was the magical science captured and celebrated under the myth of Racial Democracy as evident in Brazil and many other Latin-American and Caribbean societies which was supposed to be the fundamental difference that sets them apart from the slave holdings of their North American neighbours in the USA and Canada..

3.0. Being Black in Latin America and the Caribbean: Independence, Abolition, and Beyond – the Embranquecimento Agenda

One would have expected that, with the Abolition of Slavery, the status of the Black population would have changed drastically, allowing them a measure of rights and privileges within the countries for which they and their forebears had laboured for more than 350 years. The general expectation was naturally that Abolition would mean the total Emancipation of the Black populations from any form of prejudice and oppression since that was the first major break given to them within the hitherto slave-holding polities they had been drafted into by virtue of their commodification. Furthermore, one important fact that must be borne in mind is that Abolition happened in most of the Latin American and Caribbean countries many years (decades even) after those countries had gained their formal independence from their respective mother countries – Spain, Portugal, France, and Holland. For example, in the case of Brazil, despite the fact that Independence from Portugal had been won and recognized since 1822, it would take another sixty-six years before the enslaved African and Afro-descendant populations could become totally free of slavery with the proclamation of the *Lei Áurea* (Golden Law) by the regent Princesa Isabel which formally abolished Slavery in 1888, making Brazil the last country to take this important step. The only exception being Haiti, whose Revolution culminated in the 1804 declaration of Independence from France and at the same time, the Emancipation of Slavery. But, even there, this first Black Republic of the Western Hemisphere could not guarantee all the rights and privileges of full citizenship to the Black population despite being ruled by their fellow blacks and emancipated slaves such as Toussaint Louverture, Dessaline, and the Roi Christophe.

Some of the most pertinent questions that can be asked at this level are:

1. Why did the Independence of the countries in Latin America and the Caribbean not lead to the Emancipation of the enslaved population and the Abolition of Slavery as was the case with their northern neighbour, the United States of America? Despite the fact that, just like in the case of the USA, Blacks were not only drafted into the wars of independence of virtually every one of those countries, but were also promised Emancipation by the respective national armies.
2. What happened to further truncate the dreams and hopes for total Emancipation of the Afro-descendant populations after Slavery had been abolished.?

Obviously, the answers to the posers above must be as varied and diverse as the sheer number of countries under study. However, some general trends ran through the entire region and continent, including the changed and changing dynamics of wealth production and possession which has hitherto been constructed and sustained by the enslavement of Blacks and the free

labour they were made to offer. In order to give a fair idea of how the new dynamics affected the fortune of the newly emancipated Afro-descendant populations across the region, let us take the case of four countries as an illustration, namely Argentina, Brazil, Cuba and the Dominican Republic.

### **3.1. Abolition of Slavery, Black Emancipation and the Blanqueamiento Agenda: Study Case Argentina**

Argentina is indeed a very good case study to discuss what Afro-Brazilian activist Abdias Nascimento has denounced as the official policy of racial genocide against Blacks in Latin America through the politics and praxis of racial whitening otherwise referred to as blanqueamiento. Both the Spanish term *blanqueamiento* and its Portuguese equivalent, *embranquecimento*, stem from the root “white” (*blanco/branco*) and its import in theory and practice is to whiten the population as a way of racial improvement. In plain terms, whether we are speaking of the ideological or clinical (physical and biological) whitening, the overall objective is the gradual elimination of black persons from the social, political and economic power bases in post Abolition Latin-American and Caribbean nations.

As it occurred in other Latin American countries, Argentina received more than 200,000 enslaved individuals from Africa from the 16<sup>th</sup> to the 19<sup>th</sup> century who left many indelible marks on the social and cultural landscapes of Argentina where a classical evidence being *Tango*, an African-inspired dance tradition which is today the national pride of Argentinian culture.

Even after Argentina gained independence from Spanish rule in 1816, its Black population in Argentina continued to be on the rise, moving from between 30% to 50% in the region between the capital, Buenos Aires, and the Rio Plata. However, just like its Brazilian neighbour, the ruling elites of Argentina were not at all happy that their country was regarded in Europe as an extension of Africa. Erika Denise Edwards highlights this overriding motive in her 2021 book titled *Hidding in Plain Sight* where she explains the rationale of racial whitening in Argentina:

To join the ranks of European nations such as Great Britain, France and Germany during the mid-19th century, Argentina had to physically and culturally displace its people of color. To modernize Argentina, Argentine intellectuals such as Juan Bautista Alberdi and Domingo Faustino Sarmiento, who served as president of Argentina from 1868 to 1874, called for European immigrants “to populate and to govern” the large, resource-rich country.

So, armed with the most sophisticated racist theories of the time such as Lamarckism and social Darwinism - which preached and presented as natural the principle of “survival of the fittest” and the supposedly innate inferiority of non-white populations coupled with Eugenism - which sought to assert the origin of social degeneration in the nature and habits of non-white populations, and the golden principle of *blanqueamiento*, espoused as the perfect solution to racial imbalance in favor of the population of Caucasian origin, they were bent on eliminating all traces of Blacks from the national landscape within the shortest timeframe possible. Thus, the 1853 constitution approved *blanqueamiento* as the official position in Argentina in a desperate effort to rid the nation of its slave past by encouraging even the Afro-descendants in Argentina to assume that, merely by allowing themselves to be miscegenated with white, their slave past would be automatically obliterated. Something which has been described as the exact opposite of the North American “one-drop” policy by which a drop of black blood makes someone an Afro-American.

To further compound its racist posture, Argentina invented a national discourse which only recognised the ship as the origin of its population. Thus, the Afro-Argentines were supposed to be completely cut off from any African past, a ploy that would make it possible to inscribe them within the discourse of a national identity dominated by the arrival of white immigrants, mainly Spanish and Italians from impoverished Europe to whom the country looked up for the effective whitening of its population. Records show that Argentina received some 7 million whites between 1853 and 1950. The metaphor of the ship as the only recognised origin of the Argentinian population is aptly captured in the saying that “Mexicans descend from the Aztecs, Peruvians from the Incas – but Argentinians descend from the ships,” a way of saying that once transplanted onto the Argentinian soil, the racial *roots* or the ethnic *routes* no longer mattered<sup>13</sup>. It is as if the colonial racial “amnesty” otherwise known as the “certificate of whiteness” that the Spanish crown used to sell to rich and influential black individuals under the *cédula de gracias al sacar* scheme which automatically availed them the rights and privileges of a white person were now extended to every Argentinian, thus making everyone a white Argentinian irrespective of their colour (Hernández, 2012). The ruse of this fake colour amnesty is however the withholding of such rights and privileges with regards to contemporary Afro-Argentines who continue to live in the ghettos and occupy the prisons cells.

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<sup>13</sup> Cf. Article: “Time to challenge Argentina’s white European self-image, black history experts say. <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2021/may/31/argentina-white-european-racism-history>).

As we can see, racial mixing with the intent of producing a *mestizo* (population) is essentially one of the practical stages of *blanqueamiento* although Latin-American political ideologues like Brazilian sociologist Gilberto Freyre would want us to believe that *mestiçagem* became an end in itself within the discourse of Racial Democracy whereby the whiteness and blackness would become diffused and de-emphasised because the lines are now blurred in a predominantly “brown” population known as *pardo*.

The celebration of the mestizo (*mestiço*) as the super-race of the Americas is another great illusion of the myth of Racial Democracy, as aptly captured by Tanya Katerí Hernández (2012):

[a]gainst the backdrop of the pseudoscience of Lamarckian eugenics, *blanqueamiento* and *mestizaje* operated together and independently to bolster the post-Emancipation nation-building process of both diminishing blackness and creating a new race diluted of blackness. *Blanqueamiento*, and its gradual approach to the whiteness ideal across generations, provided a means both for removing some of the taint of backwardness and for philosophically opposing European eugenics. In turn, *mestizaje* countered the mongrel nation descriptor with a well-constructed illusion of moral superiority for having solved racial problems by minimizing racial differences and facilitating a racially mixed racial democracy<sup>14</sup>.

What is important for us to retain here is that, throughout Latin America and the Caribbean, the open-door policy unilaterally directed at European immigrants to migrate to the countries of the region was an option of biological selection aimed at whitening the demographic composition of the nations. It was no coincidence that every one of those nations legislated this “open-port” policy after the official end of slavery. It is also not a coincidence that every one of those nations made it clear that black immigrants were not included in the scheme as we can see in the texts of such legislations. A quick analysis of the individual *selective immigration policy* legislation in what I call the ABCD nations of Latin-America and the Caribbean should suffice here to prove our point.

### **3.1.1. Decree and Laws on Entry of White Immigrants into Argentina, Brazil, Cuba and the Dominican Republic:**

In Argentina, the original Constitution of 1853 included a provision designed to promote immigration in the following clear and unequivocal terms:

The federal government shall foster European immigration; and may not restrict, limit or burden with any tax whatsoever, the entry into the Argentine territory of

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<sup>14</sup> Tanya Kateri Hernández: “Spanish America Whitening the Race - The Un(Written) Laws of *Blanqueamiento* and *mestizaje*” in *Racial Subordination in latin America: The Role of the State, Customary Law, and the New Civil Rights Response*. Cambridge University Press, 2012;

foreigners who arrive for the purpose of tilling the soil, improving industries, and introducing and teaching the arts and sciences.

The wording of the law leaves no one in doubt that Africans and black immigrants wishing to move into Argentina as well as the descendants of the erstwhile enslaved Africans who were already part of the nation were not covered by the law. Indeed, they were completely excluded from all the privileges offered by the law as one can see from the keywords carefully selected in the text :

Foreigners enjoy within the territory of the Nation all the *civil rights of citizens*; they may *exercise their industry, trade and profession; own real property, buy and sell it; navigate the rivers and coasts; practice freely their religion; make wills and marry under the laws.* (Emphasis mine)<sup>15</sup>.

Although, in the overall discourse of the emergent Argentinian nationality, Blacks and Afro-Argentines were treated as a category of foreigners, Blacks could not enjoy the privileges underlined in the section above because those were exactly the rights which had been taken away from them by Slavery and were never restituted to them after Abolition. Such intent at exclusion becomes even more evident when one considers the case of Brazil where the law on European immigration known as the *Lei Glicério*, and the Decree number 528 of 1890 were reinforced by another law which criminalised blacks socio-economic and cultural activities such as samba performance, capoeira, drumming etc. which became alternative engagements in the face of their exclusion from the lands which they had tilled for more than 350 years.

### **3.2. Abolition of Slavery Black Emancipation and the *Embranquecimento* Agenda in Brazil**

The stranglehold of the Brazilian laws aimed at completely emasculating the Black population is thus exemplified in the two emblematic decrees of the Brazilian Republic: The one opening the ports of Brazil unconditionally for the entry of European immigrants while the other, known as the *Lei da Vadiagem* (Law Against Loafing) sought to create a legal justification for the criminalisation of the black population, targeting the mass of Afro-descendants who had been ejected from the land without any guarantee of employment or accommodation since the white immigrants were discouraged from engaging their paid services. It is highly desirable here to compare the texts and wording of the two Brazilian laws:

#### *3.2.1. Decreto n° 528, de 28 de Junho de 1890*

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<sup>15</sup> Cf. *Argentinian 1853 Constitution*. Translated by Jonathan M. Miller and Fang -Lian Liao. Oxford University Press.

The Decree No. 528 of 28<sup>th</sup> June 1890 legislates on the entry and settlement of immigrants into the Republic of the United States of Brazil. Signed by General Manoel Deodoro da Fonseca, Head of the Interim Government, and in the name of the Brazilian nation barely a few months after it became a Republic on 15<sup>th</sup> November 1889 and adopting as the national motto *Ordem e Progresso* (Orderliness and Progress), the text of this law makes it clear that the European immigrants were being anxiously expected in Brazil and that the government intended to make good all the promises of a good life earmarked for them, which in turn confirmed that the Brazilian government must have consciously undertaken some rigorous advertisement to encourage the immigrants to choose Brazil as their preferred new home in the face of competition from other Latin American and Caribbean destinations:

*Considerando a conveniencia de regularisar o serviço da immigração na Republica, de modo que os immigrantes tenham segura garantia da effectividade dos auxilios que lhes forem promettidos para o seu estabelecimento;*

(Considering the necessity of clearly defining the goals and intents of the immigration services of the Republic such that the immigrants may have full guarantee of the effectiveness of the governmental support they have been promised towards their installation in the country)

*Considerando que da adopção de medidas adequadas e tendentes a demonstrar o empenho e as intenções do Governo, relativamente á immigração, depende o desenvolvimento da corrente immigratoria e a segura applicação dos subsidios destinados áquelle serviço, ao qual se acha intimamente ligado o progresso da Nação;*

(Considering that the success of the immigration drive depends on the effective adoption of adequate and vigorous measures to demonstrate the seriousness and intentions of the Government with regard to its immigration policy especially the application of subsidies promised to the immigrants whose coming is considered intimately linked to the progress of the Nation)

*Considerando que a protecção dada aos immigrantes e as medidas que assegurarem a sua prompta e conveniente collocação concorrem efficaçmente para interessal-os na prosperidade dos estabelecimentos em que forem localisados;*

(Considering that the protection given to the immigrants and the measures taken to ensure their immediate and convenient settlement will have a direct impact on the prosperity of the regions in which they settle)

*Considerando que faz-se conveniente a concessão de favores que animem a iniciativa particular e auxiliem o desenvolvimento das propriedades agricolas, facilitando-lhes a aquisição de braços, de modo, porém, que seja attendida a conveniente collocação dos immigrantes, decreta:*

(Considering that it is considered necessary to concede favours and privileges capable of encouraging private initiatives that will boost the development of

agriculture by attracting desirable labour which is epitomised by the arrival of immigrants, the president hereby decrees as follows):

*Art. 1º E' inteiramente livre a entrada, nos portos da Republica, dos individuos válidos e aptos para o trabalho, que não se acharem sujeitos á acção criminal do seu paiz, exceptuados os indigenas da Asia, ou da Africa que sómente mediante autorização do Congresso Nacional poderão ser admittidos de accordo com as condições que forem então estipuladas.*

(Article I - The free entry into Brazilian ports is hereby completely authorized for able-bodied and healthy persons who are fit for work and who have not been condemned for any criminal offense in their country of origin, except for citizens of Asia, or Africa, who can only be admitted into the country by express authorization from the National Congress subject to specific conditions)

The text of the Brazilian Law thus leaves no one in doubt that the white population was being injected into the country at the expense of the already existing Black population as a demographic counterbalance. At the same time that the Black population was being stifled out by the concerted denial of access to employment with this state replacement of their services in the labour market with the imported hands from Europe, the *Lei da Vadiagem* would be introduced to further edge them out of the polity by banning their every activity which were termed as acts of laziness (*vadiagem*). The expression “*negro parado é suspeito, correndo é culpado*”<sup>16</sup> obviously stemmed from the many unsavoury experiences the emancipated Afro-Brazilians had to contend with under that law. Here is how the law was worded to ensnare the Afro-Brazilians:

### **3.2.2 *Lei da Vadiagem (Article 399 of the Penal Code of the Republic)***

*“Deixar de exercitar profissão, officio, ou qualquer mister em que ganhe a vida, não possuindo meios de subsistencia e domicilio certo em que habite; prover a subsistencia por meio de occupação prohibida por lei, ou manifestamente offensiva da moral e dos bons costumes.*

*Pena de prisão celllular por quinze a trinta dias” (Brasil, 1890)*

(Non possession of any profession, occupation, or any acceptable means of earning a living; non demonstration of means of subsistence or a fixed domiciliary address; engaging in any act or activity intended for physical and material survival via occupations that are prohibited by law, or the act of engaging in cultural manifestations which are considered offensive to the public morality and good behaviours).

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<sup>16</sup> Lit. A black person in an immobile state is suspect, if he happens to be running, then he must be guilty of some crime.



Obviously, there is nothing more to add here since the content speaks for itself. Now, let us see how the same intent on Black exclusion played out in Cuba

### **3.3. Abolition of Slavery, Black Emancipation, and the *Blanqueamiento* Agenda in Cuba**

In his article titled “Two Dangers, One Solution: Immigration, Race and Labour in Cuba (1900 - 1930),”<sup>17</sup> Alejandro de la Fuente reported that between 1902 and 1931, more than 800,000 white workers were imported by the Cuban Government from Spain and the Canary Islands as measures of demographic *blanqueamiento* (Whitening of the population). However, because the majority of such workers chose to migrate as single male seasonal workers, the desired impact was lost on the Cuban society. One can only imagine that the seasonal presence of such white migrants would indirectly enhance the growth of the mestizo population because such young males would, invariably, go for the Afro-Cuban women as the only available alternative to satisfy their sexual desires. The same researcher recorded how the overall anti-black agenda of the immigration laws became even more obvious when the same government turned down the application of the Cuban Sugar Company seeking to bring in 4,000 black workers from Jamaica. According to Fuente (p.33), “President Estrada Palma (1902 -1906) refused to authorize the United Fruit Company to contract Jamaicans for its plantation in Oriente. And in 1912, an authorization granting the Ponupo Manganese Company the right to import 2,000 laborers was later cancelled on the grounds that it had not specified that the workers “were to be black” (p. 34).

Apparently, the *blanqueamiento* effort failed in Cuba due to the difficulty to get Spanish seasonal labourers to migrate with their families and/or settle on the island as desired by the regime, whereas the blooming sugar business in the aftermath of World War I forced the Cuban regime to open a reluctant exception and allow black immigrants from neighbouring Haiti, Jamaica and other Caribbean countries, thereby allowing Blacks to maintain their demographic advantage inherited from the period of slavery. However, even though the Cuban regime failed to significantly whiten the population through immigration as it happened elsewhere in Latin America, other mechanisms and excuses would be employed to decimate the Afro-Cuban population. For example, Tanya Katerí Hernández (2012) singled out the Race War of 1912, an aftermaths of the Morúa Law which had wanted to promote the political emancipation of Afro-Cuban populations: “When the black group organized a political party to repeal the Morúa law,

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<sup>17</sup> *International Labor and Working Class History*, No. 51. Spring, 1997. pg. 30 - 49

the government suppression, in what came to be called the “Race War of 1912,” was violent, massive, and enmeshed in the *blanqueamiento* national focus”<sup>18</sup>

### **3.4. Abolition of Slavery Black Emancipation and the Blanqueamiento Agenda in the Dominican Republic**

The case of the Dominican Republic was even more distinct from the pattern of *blanqueamiento* practised by other Latin-American and Caribbean nations. The long and stormy relations with its eastern neighbour - Haiti - has always played a preponderant role in the racial definition of the Dominican population. Unable to attract any sizeable and organised white immigration movement, obviously due to its proximity to Haiti which makes it unattractive for potential white migrants and their families, the Caribbean nation opted for the myth of the native-American ancestor in a desperate effort at neutralising Black presence. Celebrated since the regime of president Rafael Leónidas Trujillo (1931 - 1961), this myth was deployed to explain away the coloured Dominican population by claiming for them a miscegenation of the white conquistadores with the Amerindian population. Thus, the rhetoric of the *indio* as the national figure became a subterfuge not only to exclude Blacks from the national polity, but also to define Dominican citizenship in a way that the descendants of their Haitian neighbours who form a sizeable part of the population can be effectively disenfranchised and expelled. Indeed, as late as 2015, the Dominican Republic invoked a law that justifies the expulsion of individuals of Haitian parentage on Dominican soil after 1929.<sup>19</sup>

Having demonstrated thus far the odds stacked against the Afro-descendants within the diverse countries of Latin America and the Caribbean, our next segment will be dedicated to the strategies employed to dribble racial discrimination, combat economic dis-empowerment, contend political disenfranchisement, and put an end to social exclusion. However, in order to save precious time and space, and not to overload this Lecture with details from the thirty-three countries that make up the living corpus of my life research in Latin America and the Caribbean, I would like to crave the indulgence of this august audience to concentrate the last and final episode of this our *Latinísima Telenovela* on examples taken from Brazil, to which, undoubtedly I have always accorded the preeminent place in my research for different obvious and not-so-obvious reasons of which it may be expedient to mention just two. Firstly my selection of Brazil as the ultimate laboratory for my research on Afro-Latin-American and

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<sup>18</sup> Op. Cit.

<sup>19</sup> Cf. John McDevitt: “Dominican Republic: Behind the Deportation of Descendants of Haitians ”. [https://flyer-generator.herokuapp.com/?article\\_url=https://flyer-components.herokuapp.com/posts/52998](https://flyer-generator.herokuapp.com/?article_url=https://flyer-components.herokuapp.com/posts/52998) accessed on 03.07.2023.

Caribbean identity studies is easily deduced from two distinct viewpoints, namely, the imponent of Brazil as a country of continental dimensions, covering more than half of the entire region in land and water mass as well as in populational terms, makes it a natural choice, and secondly, as the land of my first contact with this amazing Afro-Latin world of admirable and resilient subjects whom I discovered in 1990 as a young impressionable student of proud Yoruba origins and cultural credentials. Unlike the notorious Colón-nial and Cabralian discoveries of Latin America and the Caribbean which have foisted on the Modern global conscience the indelible historical sense and burden of guilt because of the violence of its occupation of this luxurious landscape for which the European *ego conquistador* had to literally assassinate millions of Amerindian natives and brutalize tens of millions of native Africans, my own encounter with Afro-Latin-America was more of a self-discovery. A self-discovery of the intricate and enormous values of the African identity which I had hitherto carried so carelessly. Specifically, it was for me a self-discovery of my self-worth as a Yoruba person who discovered that my ordinary, everyday Yoruba identity back in Africa has been transformed into an ardent *credo* in Afro-Latin-American societies. Indeed, my encounter with *Bahia de Todos os Santos* was literally a cultural *despierta* which left me not just marveling at this miracle that has transformed my culture into the default Afro-Latin-American culture where I discovered, to my utmost delight, that the smallest aspects of our daily existence back in Yorubaland such as our humble gastronomical icons like *àkàrà*, *èkò* and *òlèlè* have assumed extraplanetary status for the palate of humans, saints and deities in Bahia of All Saints. I discovered that the Yoruba language and its scores of dialects, of which the (À)nàgo was almost a reference of dialectical insignificance in the African commonplace is held in the Afro-Latin Diaspora as the ultimate *sanscrit* not only within the sacred walls of the *terreiros de candomblé* and their twins in Cuban Santería, Trinidadian Sango, etc., but has been promoted to the utmost parameter of a *lingua franca* and an (alter)native language of the deepest Afro-cultural pride in Afro-Latin America. *Enfim*, I discovered, to my utmost delight, that the humble *òriṣàs* like Ogun, Èṣù, Òṣun, Ọbàtála, Yemọṣja, Ajé, Olókun, Ọṣọ̀ṣì, Ọbalúayé etc. whom the colonial missionary despots and their naïve native agents have often maligned and made to look unimportant and even, sometimes, criminal, in my native Africa, and whom most of us used to take for granted back home; the magnificent Egungun dancers whom I and my siblings and friends used to follow with juvenile glee around the littered streets of my native Ile-Ifè from *Ilé Ayórunbò* to *Ilé Lúkóun*, have suddenly assumed Olympian status in Afro-Latin America as the most eminent of the revered deities from Brazil to Cuba, from Trinidad to Haiti, from Puerto Rico to Uruguay, and from Colombia to Santo Domingo. Yes, the miracle of my

self-discovery in Bahia in 1990 forever transformed Ifá from a simple pastime of our native existential curiosity to a universally acclaimed oracular science avidly sought after by millions in Afro-Latin America not only to unravel the secrets of their past, present and future, but also to reassert their humanity and self-esteem as belonging to a great tradition of oracular science, technology and impressive *oralitura* esthetics of unsurpassable depth and enduring values.

That, *meine Damen und Herren*, was what triggered my literal and literary renaissance in Bahia de Todos os Santos in 1990 and prompted me to embark on this ambitious, self-imposed mission of projecting a re-approximation of the two sides of the Yoruba Atlantic which has eventually taken me through the entire Latin-American and Caribbean region in a dialogue devoid of cultural or pretentious ventriloquism within the past thirty-three years whose primordial objective is to further discover, nurture, promote and celebrate the enduring Yoruba ethos, ethics, and aesthetics in the intricate fabric of the construction of cultural identities in Afro-Latin America and the Caribbean and for which I eventually designed, during my doctoral years in Bahia between 2002 and 2005, my homegrown theory of *YoruBaianidade* and the concept of Yoruba *oralitura* as analytical tools to evaluate and dissect complex Afro-Latin literary, ethnic, religious and cultural texts from Brazil, Cuba, Trinidad and Tobago, Venezuela, Colombia, Jamaica, Haiti, Puerto Rico, the USA and Canada.

The second reason for electing to concentrate on Brazil as the ultimate analytical corpus for this final episode of our Afro-Latin Diaspora telenovela is inextricably connected to the fame and centrality of Brazil within Afro-Latin theoretical formulations and praxis over the past century and a half. From Herskovits to Spenser, from William Bascom to Lorenzo Dow Turner, from Roger Bastides to Pierre Verger, from Ruth Landes to Stefania Capone, from James Matory to Lívio Sansone, the general consensus among scholars of Afro-Latin Diaspora has always been premised on the centrality of Brazil, especially Bahia and its *Recôncavo* radius as the ultimate key to understand the dynamics of the African presence, memory, resistance and agency in the Americas. That was why Bahia has come to be known over the years as the *Roma Negra*, the Black Rome from where the *queto-nagô pontificacy* of Afro-Latin identity influences and determines parameters, and supplies the fundamental ingredients for the construction of collective Afro-cultural identities across the entire Latin-American and Caribbean regions.

### **EPISODE THREE: Afro-Descendant Self-(Re)Discovery and the (Re)negotiation of Identity and Citizenship – the Brazilian Cultural Laboratory**

Taking our cue from the Fanonian theory of the Emancipation of the Colonized subject which he predicted must pass through three distinct stages that he calls *moments*, viz: the moment of *prise de conscience*, the moment of self-assertion, which would then culminate in the moment of *mot d'ordre* (watchword) or *grito de guerra* (war cry), we can easily identify the evolution of the agency of Afro-descendant subjects in the Americas. In my theorisation efforts on the subject, I always love to refer to the metaphor of Kunta Kinte, the hero of Alex Harley's best-seller: *ROOTS: The Saga of an American Family* (1976) as emblematic of the enslaved African's simultaneous moment of *prise de conscience and self-assertion* within his American odyssey. Once Kunta Kinte realised that he had been so forcefully and callously uprooted from his native land in present-day Guinea, and transported to this cold land of America, he literally "hit the ground running". Significantly, not even the cruel mutilation of his foot by the angry slave-hunter who caught him after his umpteenth attempt at running away could stop him from seeking for a way out of Slavery and regaining his sequestered humanity at all costs.

Thanks to the profusion of research on the Brazilian slave past in the course of the last one and half centuries, it is very easy to map out the long process of self-redemption and emancipation of the Afro-descendant populations from the 16<sup>th</sup> century to the present day. The agency of the enslaved Africans within the different forms and modalities of resistance to slavery has been well documented by very eminent scholars who have copiously registered the hundreds of slave revolts and uprisings in Brazil, the most emblematic being probably the 1835 *Revolta dos Malês*, led by Nagô, Hausa and *Malê* (muslim) intellectuals among the enslaved and freed African population of Bahia. The same can be said of Cuba, where a Lucumi carpenter - José Antonio Apunté, led what came to be known in history as the Apunté Conspiracy of La Havana in 1812. The same rigorous scholarship has yielded well detailed documentation and documentaries on the *quilombo* republics in Brazil and their *palenque, cumbe and cimarrón* equivalents in Colombia, Puerto Rico and other parts of the Afro-Hispanic world. In some cases, the agency, heroism and organisation deployed by the enslaved Africans and their creole leaders as was the case of Zumbi dos Palmares and his lieutenants in the *Quilombo dos Palmares* whose resistance and independence lasted for close to a century (1605 - 1695) made it to stand out as the earliest known, and longest surviving, independent Black Republic in the Americas.

Significantly, it was this model of a black republic which inspired Afro-Brazilian revolutionary theorists of the Abdian generation to reinvent and deploy the African pride and agency in the quest for full citizenship rights and privileges for the Afro-Brazilian population in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century as a the veritable alternative to the lie that was the Myth of Racial Democracy.

#### 4.1. *Quilombismo*: Contesting the Myth of Racial Democracy on the Road to Affirmative Actions

As we have mentioned in the previous segment, the very rich and long list of Slave Revolts and Maroon communities spread all over the Latin-American landscape is an eloquent testimony to the combative spirit of the enslaved Africans who would stop at nothing to regain their freedom and recover their dignity in an attempt to re-affirm their humanity. Abdias Nascimento<sup>20</sup>, certainly Brazil's, and perhaps one of Latin America's most eloquent 21<sup>st</sup> Century Afro-descendant scholars, activists and theorists, came up with the theory of *Quilombismo*<sup>21</sup> as both an homage to the resilient spirit of the Afro-Brazilian enslaved ancestors as epitomised in the personality of Zumbi dos Palmares (1655 - 1695), leader of the most emblematic maroon community in the Americas which succeeded in transforming itself into what can be classified as the first Black-American Republic long before the birth of Haiti, and the golden *mot d'ordre* à la Fanon, which must serve as the key to permanently dismantle the myth of Racial Democracy and pave the way for a more egalitarian society with the guarantee of equal opportunities for the descendants of the enslaved Africans and those of their erstwhile enslavers.

As I have had occasions to analyse profoundly in some of my previous works, the contribution of the Abdian generation was of utmost importance in the birth of the new Afro-consciousness in Brazil and other contemporary Latin-American and Caribbean societies<sup>22</sup> especially with regards to the construction of a collective consciousness among Afro-Latin-American communities and subjects which was promoted in tandem with the Pan-Africanist aspirations that swept across the Black Atlantic landscapes since the 20<sup>th</sup> century. It is to him that the Afro-descendant populations owe the blueprint of the various Affirmative Actions backed by diverse

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<sup>20</sup>Born Abdias do Nascimento to poor black parents in the interior of São Paulo, Brazil. Abdias made a point of his self-discovery and total emancipation by dropping the "do" (of, belonging to) before his surname which he claims was the ultimate marker of slavery to commodify enslaved individuals.

<sup>21</sup> Quilombo is the name commonly used in Brazil to describe communities constituted by enslaved individuals and groups who have decided to seek their freedom by all means, running away from their masters and facing every odd to survive in their refuge that is usually located in an isolated place - deep forests, mountain tops, islands, etc where they can mount their own defense mechanisms to repel attacks and attempts to re-enslave them. Another term that is also common in Brazil for such communities is *Mocambo*. In the Hispanic-Americas space, such communities were known as *palenques* while their inhabitants were generally referred to as *cimarrones*. Both Quilombo and Mocambo have their roots in the languages of the bantu-speaking peoples of West-Central Africa. However, I have argued in some of my theorisations that the concept of Quilombo stylistically and phonetically evokes the ultimate expression of defiance common in Yoruba thought and praxis when a subordinate, vassal or colonised subject chooses to reject the joug of oppression and call the bluff of his oppressor with the expression: "kilo mbo loke tile o gbà!", meaning that he was ready to go to any extent, including risking his very life, to stake his claim to freedom and emancipation.

<sup>22</sup> Cf Quilombismo.... (2014); AdN (2021)...

Brazilian laws including the landmark Law 10.639/03 which broke centuries of silence and state omission by making official and compulsory the teaching of the history and culture of Africa and African descendants at all levels of the Brazilian educational system<sup>23</sup>. Significantly, it was also to the credit of the visionary commitment of Abdias Nascimento that Brazil created under the Presidency of the Federative Republic a most powerful Ministry for Racial Equality named Secretaria Especial da Presidência para a Promoção da Igualdade Racial (SEPPIR) which came to strengthen the existing Fundação Cultural Palmares as direct state agencies to redress the four centuries of racial discrimination and oppression against the Brazilian black population.

More significantly however, the greatest merit of the Abdian revolution launched since the 1950s when he not only created the *Teatro Experimental do Negro* (TEN) – The Black Experience Theatre<sup>24</sup>, but also worked assiduously to endow the national Black Front (*Frente Negra Brasileira*) and the United Negro Movement Union MNU – *Movimento Negro Unificado* with a structure that literally drew an enduring Black Manifest (Manifesto Negro) that formally and effectively silenced the hitherto officially promoted myth of Racial Democracy by exposing the silent genocide against Afro-descendants in Brazil and reinstated the self-esteem of millions of Brazilians of African origin.

The sustained activism of Abdias Nascimento who challenged the Brazilian state's use of the cruel mechanisms of genocide camouflaged as Racial Democracy against Afro-descendants at diverse levels such as educational, political, economic and social, by encouraging the Afro-descendants to look inwards into the glorious African past and the indelible prowess of their Afro-diasporic ancestors such as Zumbi dos Palmares, Dandara, and Acotirene, etc. who must henceforth serve as their role models, icons and ideological weapons to ultimately free themselves of the last shackles of slavery entrenched in the myth of Racial Democracy and the illusions of *embranquecimento*.

In response to his ardent calls for a concerted onslaught of these obnoxious projects of the racist Brazilian elites after Democracy was restored in Brazil in the early 1980s in the wake of

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<sup>23</sup> The same Law resonated in other Latin-American countries, notably Colombia where the Law 725 of 2001 had earlier instituted the 21<sup>st</sup> of May as the Day of Afro-Colombian as an equivalent to the Brazilian Dia da Consciência Negra celebrated on 20<sup>th</sup> November.

<sup>24</sup> Although it is most common to find this concept translated as Black Experimental Theatre, I insist it should be translated as the Black Experience Theatre in order to affirm the ideological import of the project and the agency of the participants who were, by no means, amateurs to the theatre arts.

the *Direitas Já* movements, bringing to an end decades of military dictatorship which had forced into self-imposed or state-induced exile Abdias himself, like many other black and dissident intellectuals of his time – Gilberto Gil, Caetano Veloso, and Jorge Amado, among others, the Black communities all over Brazil started to re-group and re-invent themselves. From São Paulo to Rio de Janeiro, from Bahia to Porto Alegre, from Minas to Paraná, Afro-Brazilian intellectuals and activists initiated a series of concerted actions aimed at recovering the humanity of the Afro-descendants by giving them reasons and agency to celebrate their African ascendance through the formation of religious and cultural organisations where Africa and African values were exclusively and specifically elected as the model of Afro-Brazilian pride and praxis. Thus were born different intellectual, cultural and carnival groups like Ilê Aiyê, Olodum, Muzenza, Ara Ketu and scores of others in Bahia while in other regions like Rio and São Paulo, groups like *Gelede*, *Instituto de Mulheres Negras*, *Quilomb'hoje* and other ethnic associations inspired in the American Black Power and Black Panthers traditions sprang up to reclaim the Afro-descendant social, physical, politica, and economic territories.

Significantly, the last thirty years have witnessed a considerable improvement in the condition of the Brazilian Afro-descendant population although the situation is still far from the expected ideal. Through the Black agency on diverse fronts, the Brazilian state has had to contend more with the renaissance of its teeming Black population and their avid quest for citizenship rights. Today, it is possible to affirm that Afro-descendants have come full cycle in their engagement with their mirror image in Brazil. They no longer shy away from their Afro-identity as they have successfully traversed the dark night of Afro-pessimism and can now speak out against any and every form of open, perceived or intended racism and discrimination which, thanks to decades of Black agency, the Brazilian state has now been made by law to criminalise, condemn and repair. Although the statistics of under-employment, under-representation in the political and economic spheres still plague the Afro-descendant population in Brazil and other Afro-Latin-American and Caribbean societies, such inequalities are no longer allowed to be passed off as natural and inevitable.

If one would judge the situation by the enigmatic poser of the Indian-American scholar, Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak who asked what looked like a rhetorical question: “Can the subaltern speak?” (1988)<sup>25</sup>, one can respond today with the insight of the Fanonian theory and praxis of decolonisation that has empowered the historically dis-advantaged and dis-enfranchised Afro-

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<sup>25</sup> Cf. Spivak, Gayatri. “Can the Subaltern Speak?”. in Cary Nelson and Lawrence Grossberg (eds). *Marxism and the Interpretation of Culture*. London: Macmillan, 1988.



descendants that, with the backing of the laws against racial discrimination, the laws of gender and social protection, coupled with the social and symbolic capital that decades of Black agency have helped to entrench in Brazil by allowing a gradual but steady and sustained citizenship for the Afro-descendants with the possibilities of immediate redress, one can safely affirm that the enigmatic moment of the Fanonian *mot d'ordre* is here.

It is instructive to note the ease with which Afro-Brazil can now raise its voice and call to order any erring polity including even highly-placed government officials in full exercise of their mandate, denounce racial profiling, oppression, discrimination and the attendant social exclusion which still makes the Afro-descendants the victims of police violence and social relegation to the inglorious *favelas* as evidenced in the following lyrics of a song by Cazuza titled “Brasil, mostra tua cara” which I have analyzed in a previous essay as the ultimate *mot d'ordre* against the now proverbial racial and social exclusion that have always existed in Brazil under the very gaze of the official myth of Racial Democracy whose blatant flagrance was finally exposed to the entire world during the celebration of the 500<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of the Discovery of the Americas commemorated and celebrated in Brazil, Cuba and elsewhere on the continent in 2000.

### **Brasil by Cazuza<sup>26</sup>**

<i>Não me convidaram</i>	They did not invite me
<i>Pra esta festa pop</i>	to this jazzy party
<i>Que os homens armaram</i>	which was put up
<i>Pra me convencer</i>	in an attempt to convince me
<i>A pagar sem ver</i>	To pay without saying
<i>Toda essa droga</i>	Nothing of this mess
<i>Que já vem malhada</i>	which dates back to
<i>Antes de eu nascer...</i>	long before I was born
<i>Não me ofereceram</i>	No one offered me
<i>Nem um cigarro</i>	not even a cigarette
<i>Fiquei na porta</i>	I was made to man the gate
<i>Estacionando os carros</i>	Helping them to park their cars
<i>Não me elegeram</i>	No one elected
<i>Chefe de nada</i>	into any position of authority
<i>O meu cartão de crédito</i>	My only credit card
<i>É uma navalha...</i>	is a pocket knife...

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<sup>26</sup> Born Agenor Miranda Araújo Neto, Cazuza was one of the most emblematic representatives of the Rock-in-Rio tradition. The track, *Brasil, mostra tua cara* (Brazil, show your true face) in the album aptly titled *Ideologia* (Ideology) is indeed a mirror of the spirit of contestation of the myth of Racial Democracy in Brazil by exposing the systemic and systematic exclusion of a large segment of the population, the so-called PPP - Preto, pobre, periférico (blacks, poor, and periphery dwellers).

*Brasil!*  
*Mostra tua cara*  
*Quero ver quem paga*  
*Pra gente ficar assim*  
*Brasil! ...*

*Brazil!*  
*Show your true face*  
*I want to know those who are paying*  
*to keep us in this mess*  
*Brazil!...*

My reading of Cazusa's questioning is that of a confirmation that the Afro-descendant population in Brazil and elsewhere can now speak with their own voice after centuries of silencing by the system.<sup>27</sup> They can now stand up for their rights as Bob Marley urged them to do more than four decades ago. Indeed, they can now look in the eye any racist polity and fling in their faces the defiant aphorism of the late Ivorian novelist – Ahmadou Kourouma “*Quand on refuse, on dit non!*”<sup>28</sup> – which perfectly translates the Yoruba aphorism: *enu eni la fi nkọ méjẹ!* (It is with one's mouth that one says “I refuse to eat what you are offering me!”)<sup>29</sup>

And within the same Fanonian concept, once that stage of *mot d'ordre* is attained, the individual or the group can be said to be truly emancipated and free. Free to live, free to die, free to love, free to act, indeed free to choose who to love and how (not) to love, etc. within a larger project of ethnic agency which empowers members of the group to arrogate to themselves such fundamental epistemological parameters that determine what is true, beautiful and good (*verdade, belo e bom*) beyond the pseudo-universalist Eurocentric parameters hitherto applicable to their detriment.

#### **4.2. Afro-Latin Genius and Creativity as an Ideological Weapon to Negotiate Racial Inclusion and Citizenship**

It is, therefore, not surprising that it was the creative genres such as music, the arts, and other cultural fields that served as the launching pads of the confrontation of the existing power dynamics by Afro-descendant populations in the Americas. Be it in their masterful takeover and complete transformation of the carnival traditions from Rio to Havana, from Trinidad to Colombia, from Bahia to Recife, or the counter-hegemonic imposition of African-inspired aesthetics and African-derived associative and cultural organizations capable of efficiently deploying Afrocentric discourses on what is true, beautiful or good as evident in the adoption

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<sup>27</sup> Cf. Ayoh'OMIDIRE, “Fome Zero...” (2014)

<sup>28</sup> Kourouma Ahmadou, *Quand on refuse on dit non*. Paris: Seuil, 2004,

<sup>29</sup> Indeed, as rightly pointed out by Susanne Gehrmann in her 2010 Inaugural Lecture (pg. 22), the aphorism originated from Samory Touré, the legendary 19<sup>th</sup> Century Islamic scholar who led the resistance to French colonial ambitions in the West African Sahel.

of what I have described in my book *YoruBaianidade: Oralitura e epistêmica nagô na construção de uma identidade afro-cultural nas Américas* (2020) as the unapologetic promotion of the *Odara* concept in Brazil which makes it possible for an Afro-Brazilian cultural outfit like *Ilê Aiyê* not only to adopt for itself the epithet: *o mais belo dos belos* (the epitome of beauty) but also to proclaim in song after song the unmatched qualities of the *beleza negra* (Black beauty) that permits the group to exclude non-blacks from their carnival outings, to the point of even reveling in the polemical accusations of a kind of reverse racism in their Afro-pride.

Furthermore, the centrality of music as the defining essence of Afro-promotion and inclusion capable of projecting the Afro-descendant into other spheres of power dynamics, including the educational, economic and political spheres within the Afro-Latin-American and Caribbean societies cannot be over-emphasised. Apart from the captivating rhythms of the diverse and diversified genres like *samba, calypso, chá-chá-chá, guanguancó, rumba, reggae, salsa, tango, cumbe, etc.* the underlying poetic discourse of power which may have been overlooked as secondary cannot but yield to the attentive listener a profound collective yearning for racial justice, political inclusion, economic emancipation and social freedom. Thus, even the most innocent sounding, fun-seeking songs would yield deeply-rooted resentments and social *angst* as to the future prospects of the precarious social harmony suggested by the theory and praxis of Racial Democracy under the camouflage of genetic miscegenation and the apparent triumph of *mestiçagem*.

It is only when one looks closely at the lyrics of most of those innocent-sounding hits like track “Somos Cubanos” (1999) by the world-famous Cuban musical group *Los Van Van* that one gets to appreciate the full import of the deployment of the proverbial Fanonian *mot d'ordre*.

*Para que el mundo sepa  
El porqué de nuestro sabor  
Cubano', vamo' pa'llá*

*En 1400 llegó Colón  
Y descubrió a esta hermosa isla  
Donde habitaba la raza india  
La que con el tiempo exterminó  
Abusadores*

*Llegó la raza africana  
Y la mezclaron con la Española  
Nació la mulata criolla  
La Cubana, sí*

*Era una mezcla diferente  
Con mucho sabor*

*Acompañada de la rumba y el guaguancó*

*Dueños de la clave*

*Y la magia del tres más dos*

*Que nos hizo tan especiales*

*Gracias a Dios*

*Sí*

*Somos la mezcla perfecta*

*La combinación más pura*

*Cubano, la más grande creación*

*(Somos Cubanos, español y africanos) Seguro que sí*

*Bendito seas Señor*

*Por darnos tanta pimienta*

*Tanta sabrosura y tanto corazón*

*(Somos Cubanos, español y africanos) Cubano yo soy*

*A donde quiera que vamos ponemos la cosa buena*

*Somos candela y gozamos, qué gozón*

*(Somos Cubanos, español y africanos) Permiso, permiso, ahí*

*Eh, permiso, permiso que llegaron los cubanos*

*A recogerte*

*(Somos Cubanos, español y africanos) Pa la escuela*

*Si quieres vernos feliz*

*Pongan un lechón asado en la mesa*

*Yuca, cazuela 'e cogri*

*Y papita frita*

*Y plátano maduro pa Charly*

*Y ensalada, ah full life*

*Y una cervecita ahí, chin*

*Pa que tú vea' cómo come'*

It is instructive to note that, at the same time that the *mestizo* genius apparently extolled in what can be termed an ode to miscegenation in the opening lines which celebrate the uniqueness of the 'mulata crioulla' as the perfection of Cuban humanity and a direct gain of the Modernity inaugurated by the arrival of Columbus in the 1490s is poignantly subverted in favor of an Afro-descendant protagonism by picking out the principal attributes of the celebrated Cuban personality as those elements contributed by the Afro element after Colón-ization has decimated the native Amerindian populations:

Era una mezcla diferente

Con mucho sabor

Acompañada de la rumba y el guaguancó

Dueños de la clave

Y la magia del tres más dos

Que nos hizo tan especiales

Gracias a Dios

'Twas a different mixture

Characterised by much tastefulness

Accompanied by rumba and guaguancó

masters of the unique *clave* (rhythm marker)

and the magic of the 3 : 2 (beat)

that makes of us unbeatable geniuses

God be praised!

The Afro-protagonism is clearly evident in the creative deconstruction of the negative profiling that used to be employed by Eurocentric discourse to put down the Blacks where terms like “negrito” (nigger) and “bruja” (witch) were used as whiplashes against the Black subjects. Here, on the contrary, the same terms have now become powerful *mot d'ordre* to celebrate the Black genius:

Sí	Yes! (you can call him)
Bruja, bruja, bruja, bruja, bruja, bruja	Wizard, wizard, wizard, wizard,
Manigua y grito bailador	Manigua wizard as you watch him dance
(Bruja Manigua, negro Cimarrón) ¿Cómo?	(Manigua wizard, black Cimarrón <sup>30</sup> ), Aye!
Ataca pal norte, coge la manigua, negro	Negro, ataque from the north, uproot the
Que ahí está tu conexión	cassava, for that is your root
(Bruja Manigua, negro Cimarrón)	(Manigua wizard, black Cimarrón)
Mira que está en el cielo lo santo	Mind you, the saint who called you nigger
Que a ti te dice negrito	is up there now where he belongs
(Bruja Manigua, negro Cimarrón)	(Manigua wizard, black Cimarrón)
Tú eres la esperanza de la salsa buena	you are the hope of good salsa music
La guerra está pariendo pronto	which no war can take away
(Bruja Manigua, negro Cimarrón)	(Manigua wizard, black Cimarrón)
Y ese eres tú negrito	For there is no one like you Nigger boy
Que como tú nadie conoce la clave	who master the magic 3:2 sequence of the clave
(Bruja Manigua, negro Cimarrón)	(Manigua wizard, black Cimarrón), of course,
Claro que no!	no way!
La magia del tres más dos	The magic of the 3: 2 beat
(Bruja Manigua, negro Cimarrón)	(Manigua wizard, black Cimarrón), of course,
Claro que no!	no way!
Eh, pa'lante, pa'lante, siempre como un elefante	So, ride on!, ride on like an elephant
Devuelve la cruces pa hacer canción	Give up the cross to make your music
(Bruja Manigua, negro Cimarrón)	(Manigua wizard, black Cimarrón)
Y suena mi tambor	And let my drum speak out

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<sup>30</sup> The term *cimarrón* which would have been a death sentence during Slavery when it was used as a condemnation of blacks with rebellious spirits is today a term used with much pride by Afro-Cubans, Afro-Colombians and other Afro-hispanic activists and intellectuals.

Como dijo Nicolás, aquí el que más  
fino sea

Responde si toco yo

(Bruja Manigua, negro Cimarrón)

As old Nicholas would say, I dare anyone more  
talented

to come out and battle me here

(Manigua wizard, black Cimarrón)

And that brings us back to the Caetano Veloso clip of our epigraph: “Soy loco por ti América!” which we have described as the utmost expression of that hardwon freedom for Afro-descendants in Latin America and the Caribbean who can now sing unapologetically and make serenade to declare their love for their land: “Soy loco por ti América, loco por ti amores...”

As the amateur Brazilian musicologist Moacir Silveira pointed out in his brilliant analysis of this singular composition<sup>31</sup>, the track, composed by three eminent Baianos – Gilberto Gil, Torquato Neto e José Carlos Capinam in 1966 for their Tropicalist<sup>32</sup> soulmate, Caetano Veloso, who released it in his 1967 album, which, in a way, represented his revolutionary adieu to his native land before escaping into exile after a brief prison stint during the dark years of military dictatorship, is probably one of the best examples of the sentimental attachments to Afro-Latin American patriotic ideals. "Soy Loco Por Ti America" is also significant and symptomatic in this context as one of the very first and few Brazilian songs composed and rendered in what is popularly referred to as *Portunhol*, a blend of Portuguese and Spanish, thus further harnessing the Latino spirit and the linguistic legacy of the two major colonising powers of the Latin-American and Caribbean regions.

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<sup>31</sup> Cf. Moacir Silveira. Video Arte Musical. <https://www.youtube.com/@MoacirSilveiraVideosMusicais>

<sup>32</sup> Tropicalism, also known as *Tropicália*, was an eclectic musical and cultural movement cultivated in Brazil between 1966 and 1969 led by a group of young artists and songwriters from Bahia – Gilberto Gil, Caetano Veloso, Maria Bethânia and Gal Costa who called themselves *os doces bárbaros*. The objective was to subvert the suffocating atmosphere created by the then military regime in Brazil through some revolutionary actions in the creative arts such as music, cinema, theatre, poetry and the plastic arts. Inspired by the philosophical ideals of great thinkers like Frantz Fanon, Michel Foucault, Jacques Derrida, Gilles Deleuze, Herbert Marcuse and Guy Debord, the movement took a swipe at the concepts of Modernity and Developments from a tropicalist standpoint, questioning the relevance of such hiphalutinary ideas in the face of widespread human despair brought about by the Cold War on the global scene, and the implacable military dictatorship in Brazil with its witch-hunting campaigns against leftist intellectual, dissidents, and the general populace whom they sought to castrate through obnoxious decree such as the AI-5 (Ato Institucional 5) which makes any criticism of the state almost a capital offense, a decree which immediately forced scores of Brazilian intellectuals such as Abdias Nascimento, Caetano Veloso, Gilberto Gil, Jorge Amado and many others into exile. The generally acclaimed highpoint of the *Tropicália* Movement was the 1967 3<sup>rd</sup> Edition of the Festival of Brazilian Popular Music sponsored by the Record Television Network which featured emblematic tracks like Caetano Veloso's *Alegria Alegria* (gaity and happiness), Gilberto Gil's "Domingo no Parque" (Sunday in the public park) and *Roda Viva* by Chico Buarque de Hollanda. This was followed by the 1968 launching of the major album of the movement by an impressive collection of artists including the already-listed baianos and others like Torquato Neto, Capinam, Tom Zé, Nara Leão, Gal Costa, Rogério Duprat and the musical group known as *Os Mutantes*. The album was titled *Tropicália ou Panis et Circencis* which can be roughly translated as *Tropicalism or Bread and Bouffonery* as a direct taunting to both the insensitive Brazilian military regime as well as the questionable universality of Western and European ideas and their age-old prejudice against the epistemologies of the southern hemisphere here succinctly represented by the Tropics.

The defiant quest for the true face and identity of the Latin-American subject - a trope that Cazuza would repeat in 1999 with his refrain ("Brasil, mostra sua cara!") - gives the track a truly suggestive ardour when read against the social(ist) revolutionary pulse of the region dictated and dominated by the larger-than-life image of Ernesto Che Guevara assassinated in 1966 by capitalist forces in neighbouring Bolivia. "*El nombre del hombre muerto / Já non si puede decirlo, quién sabe? / Antes que o dia arrebente.../... El nombre del hombre es pueblo*"... (the name of the man murdered/ is now a forbidden name/ maybe not to be mentioned again/ before the new day dawns.../ the name of the man killed is the masses...)

At the same time, the track tries to disarm and dribble state censorship by evoking the sensuous presence of the "mujer prayera whose name is Martí", mixing in the same breath the iconic presence of the Cuban liberator, José Martí, with the evocative image of the Afro-Latin mestiça in her easy-going quotidian paradise on the world-famous Caribbean beaches with the lovely *Latino-American* waves globally acclaimed as a registered trademark:

Loco por ti de amores  
Tenga como colores  
La espuma blanca de Latinoamérica  
Y el cielo como bandera  
Y el cielo como bandera

At the surface level, the overall impression left by this track is undoubtedly the same vision that continues to dominate the tourist appeal and propaganda which the Latin American and Caribbean regions hold perpetually in the minds of global lovers of the magical enchantments of the Tropics: The Latin-American *mulata* eternally remembered in the image of the *Garota do Fantástico*, invented as a sensuous attraction for its Sunday night show by the TV Globo in 1983 or that of the sexy *Garota de Ipanema*, projected by the combined poetic genius of Tom Jobim and Vinicius de Moraes, and canonized in samba (*Bossa Nova*) of *Toquinho*, *João Gilberto*, and an entire generation of Brazilian singers, evoking a veritable Latina goddess flimsily clad in her beach *tanga* with undulating designs which left her body full of stars, both of them, obviously, the sophisticated and classy versions of the *mulata do samba* and *rainha da bateria* whose presence is indispensable to the successful outing of any *Escola de Samba* during the carnival of Rio de Janeiro:

Sorriso de quase nuvem  
Os rios, canções, o medo

O corpo cheio de estrelas

O corpo cheio de estrelas

And, of course, the fairy presence of this Latin-American love goddess cannot but evoke the pulse-quickenning rhythms that are native to the region, from Argentinian tango to the Trinidadian Soca and Calypso, which never cease to bewitch the nameless capitalist predators drawn like bees to this enchanting ranch.

Como se chama a amante

Deste país sem nome

Este tango, este rancho

Este povo, digei-me então

Arde o fogo de conhecê-la

O fogo de conhecê-la

Loco por ti

Loco por ti

Loco por ti

Loco por ti de amores

However, as one takes a more critical look at the lyrics, one discovers beyond the captivating rumba a subversive *Tropicalia* spirit which reasserts itself and re-affirms its Latin-American pride in the local and regional Modernism of the literary and cultural productions that celebrate the tropical palms and coconut trees which have inspired both love poems and patriotic credos in Brazil since the *Maranhense* poet, Gonçalves Dias, wrote his nostalgic poem “Minha terra tem palmeiras” (My land has palm trees) some 200 years ago in Coimbra. It is thus not difficult to discern ideological *mot d'ordre* against any form of literary chauvinism reminiscent of European colonialism in the region. That inevitably raises the issue of the subjective consciousness of the existential fragility of the Afro-descendant subject within the contemporary Latin-American and Caribbean societies where he easily falls victim to the treacherous police bullet (either strayed or aimed) making death, paradoxically, a daily metaphor for him.

Soy loco por ti, América

Soy loco por ti de amores

Estou aqui de passagem

Sei que adiante, um dia vou morrer

De susto, de bala ou vício

De susto, de bala ou vício



It is, therefore, left to each person to decide whether he wants to consider a facile analysis of the song as a metaphor of the Afro-diasporic death associated with the captivating charm of the Latin-American woman: be she a *guerillera*, a beauty model, a *garota* or a simple *camponesa*, just like Jorge Amado's Afro-Modernist characters would sing in *Mar Morto* that “é doce morrer no mar...” (it is sweet to die at sea) – nothing can be sweeter than to die in the embrace of the avid goddess Iemanjá who had the fame of drowning the seafarers whom she most desires as lovers (nos braços de quem me quiera!)

Mais apaixonado ainda  
Dentro dos braços da camponesa  
Guerrilheira, manequim, ai de mim  
Nos braços de quem me queira  
Nos braços de quem me queira

Soy loco por ti, América  
Soy loco por ti de amores  
Soy loco por ti, América  
Soy loco por ti de amores

At the level of what could be read today as the post-colonial discourse of this Tropicalist masterpiece, as a counterpoint to the widely acclaimed hegemony of the samba rhythm in Brazilian music, it is interesting to note that “Soy Loco por Ti América” was written and executed in the rumba style of Santiago de Cuba, further strengthening its regional and continental appeal, while staging an eloquent protest against any hegemony of the samba which, by then had been taken over by the Brazilian state dictatorship as one of the principal symbols of its Racial Democracy.

### **Danksagung and Conclusion**

By way of conclusion, since it is virtually impossible for me to exhaust the content of my life-long research in this passionate area of African Diaspora Studies which I feel confident enough to creatively describe here as a 33 by 33 project i.e. multiplying the number of years I have been working in this exciting research area by the number of countries that fall within my study region in Latin America and the Caribbean, I will have to content myself with the few pages herein contained, hoping they will give you, my dear listeners, and eventual readers, a good idea of this very rich and highly rewarding subject-matter. I must however mention that, due to the scope and nature of this Inaugural Lecture, I have had to leave out altogether an area of concentration that has predominated my critical analysis of the literary and cultural texts

emanating from the 33 countries of contemporary Latin America and the Caribbean and on which I have had the pleasure of publishing to date eighteen books and over a hundred book chapters and scientific journal articles, availing me at the same time the opportunity to participate in conferences, deliver seminars, guest lectures and keynote addresses in the most diverse locations of the global space from La Plata in Argentina, to San Juan de Puerto Rico, through the most improbable places like Mayagüez in Venezuela to the heartland of Sierra Leone, from Matanzas in Cuba to Ouro Preto, Cachoeira, or Santo Amaro da Purificação in Brazil... I am referring to my cartographic engagement with diverse agents, agencies, institutions and communities in the diverse locales of the research region, in my quest for what I call the re-approximation of the two coasts of the Yoruba Atlantic. Precisely, taking my cue from Matory's 1994 study where he referred to the space of our study area expanding, from West Africa to the Americas, as the *Yoruba Atlantic Complex*, I have spent a great deal of my research time and energy looking at the Yoruba worldview as a fundamental element in the construction of ethnic and cultural identities in the Americas, culminating in my 2020 book titled *YoruBaianidade: Oralitura e matriz epistêmica nagô na construção de uma identidade afro-cultural nas Américas*.

It was indeed thanks to this self-imposed Yoruba-renaissance project that I have been able to embark on the endless and ever-gratifying Atlantic adventure which has taken me around the length and breath of not only Latin American and the Caribbean, from Argentina to Mexico, from Lima to Santiago, but also to the rest of the American continent and the so-called Global North. The same project has availed me the opportunity of engaging in a very profound and intimate dialogue with my Yoruba culture from within, taking me to the remotest corners of *Ilé-Kétu*, *Grand Popo*, *Şábé* and *Idaişà* in the Republic of Benin, as well as the *Ifè-Áná* territories of Atakpamè in the Republic of Togo, a delectable journey of self-discovery to which I owe today the felicity of my total emancipation from every form of delusional myths or what I call the imposed and pseudo-universal traditions and tyranny of monoculture fostered on our world by the accidental Modernist encounters since Columbus and Cabral. I can say today that, with the ingrained understanding of my unapologetic cultural values gained from my plunge into the deepest idioms of Yoruba epistemology over the years, I have discovered that everything is indeed relative, including every value and identity to which humanity is often so desperately attached that some would not think twice before unleashing on our unwary universe a third world war of both domestic and global proportions. More importantly, I have come to realise

that there are probably many more attitudes and traditions that require urgent de-colón-isation in our global values and existence.

Therefore, in guise of a worthy *Schluss*, I would like to close this Inaugural Lecture by reminding everyone of you, good people, who have been patiently listening to my academic perorations over the course of this past hour, the evergreen wisdom of the Yoruba aphorism in defence of the above-alluded law of relativism: *Ogbón ọdún nì, wèèrè èmì..*

At this point, in the spirit of the true Yoruba *Ọmólúábí* ethos, I would like to acquit myself of the enormous debt of gratitude I have incurred over the last thirty-three years of this my Yoruba Atlantic Odyssey. As the sacred Yoruba oracular texts warns in the Odù-Ifá *Ọyẹkú-Ọfún* the worst catastrophies await he who does not know how to say a proper “Thank you”! :

*Ifá ní kàşọpé kàşọpè kàşọpé,  
A difá fúnwọ̀n ni Ijẹ̀kùn ọ̀mọ eku  
kàşọpé kàşọpè kàşọpé,  
A difá fúnwọ̀n ni Ijẹ̀kùn ọ̀mọ eja  
kàşọpé kàşọpè kàşọpé,  
A difá fúnwọ̀n ni Ijẹ̀kùn ọ̀mọ ẹ̀ni...  
Orunmila ni kàşọpé*

*Ifá mó ni kàşọpé kàşọpè kàşọpé  
Wọ̀n ní kí ọ̀mọ eku ó şọpé  
Ọ̀mọ eku ní nítorí i kínni?  
Ọ̀runmila ní nítorí i jíjẹ àti mímu ọ̀fẹ́  
ọ̀mọ eku ní ọ̀un ò níi şọpé  
Ikú àişọpé ní i pàwọ̀n ọ̀mọ eku...  
Njé èmi Olápàdé Àkánjì,  
ọ̀mọ Tayelolú Ìgésé  
Ma wá á şèbà-şọpé ẹ̀ tẹ̀mi lóni o...<sup>33</sup>*

Conscious of the impossibility of mentioning every individual, groups and institutions to whom I owe this enormous debt of gratitude, I would like to cite at least the most obvious, starting from the unbeatable trinity responsible for charting ones course in life - *Olódumarè Agòtún*

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<sup>33</sup> The risk of content and stylistic loss makes the translation of this type of oracular text perilous. Suffice to say that it urges humans to always remember to show appreciation to benefactors.

(*Oba-Aténi-légélégé-fori-sagbeji-omi!*); *Ọ̀r̀nmilà-Bara-Agbonirègún* (*ákònilórò-bí-ìyekan-èni!*), and the inimitable *Orí Àtètèníran* (*Atètè-gbéni-kòòsà!*<sup>34</sup>).

My most profound gratitude goes to all my teachers, *mestres* and *mestras* from whose wealth of knowledge I have been privileged to learn the little I know today. For me, you have always been, and shall continue to be my veritable Lords, spiritual and temporal, in this quest for knowledge and science! I equally thank all the institutions that have made the knowledge accessible to me in every possible and impossible format: colleges, universities, shrines and temples, where I have received my inductions. In this category, I must single out my university of origin, the Obafemi Awolowo University, Ile-Ife, Nigeria, from where I was inducted into this exciting world of the academia some 36 years ago. I equally thank the Universidade Federal da Bahia, Salvador, Bahia, Brazil, my second base, where I have received my most-coveted title and recognition as a global scholar, and, of course, the Humboldt-Universität zu Berlin, where this same scholarship has been nurtured continually since my first visit as a DAAD Fellow in the summer of 2009. In this particular context, I am compelled to single out and thank in a special way two eminent scholars who have been my constant support and most welcoming interlocutors here at the Humboldt University over the course of the past 14 years at the *Institut für Asien- und Afrikawissenschaften* (IAAW) both of whom are, fortunately, present at this ritual of my academic coronation. To you, *liebe Frau* Prof. Flora Veit-Wild, and to you, *liebe Frau* Prof. Dr. Susanne Gehrman, I say a big Thank You!

A special appreciation goes equally to all the sponsoring agencies that have generously funded my insatiable quest for knowledge with diverse scholarships, fellowships and research grants over the decades, notably CAMÕES of Portugal, *Agence Internationale de la Francophonie* (AIF) of France, CAPES and CNPq of Brazil, and DAAD, AVH. DIES and HRK of Germany.

Finally, I want to thank my family for the unconditional and unwavering support I have enjoyed through-out. You are indeed my significant others in this journey of life, and whatever success I have achieved is essentially yours - Anikeade and Ana Carolina; Ifedayo Imanuela, Omotunde Maria-Benedicta, Omolola Oluwatosin, Olufikayo Petra-Antonieta, Inaê Tiwalayo

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<sup>34</sup> Same for this category of personal epithets known as *oriki* in Yoruba literary traditions.

Olaife Àyòkà, and Awokayodê Olabiyi Babalola Àrèmu. To my dear parents - Ọlawuni Àrèmu, ọmọ Eunice Omitipe, and Táyélólú Ìgèsé, ọmọ Rachael Adekumbi, I pay my filial homage.

And last but not least, I must appreciate my spiritual essence - Ọbàrà-Ọsa - my veritable *Onilé* who will never allow my abode to crumble:

*Kèlèmbè balè fara yíruku kítí-kítí-kítí*  
*A dífá fún Mo-şohun-gbogbo-tán*  
*Tíí sọmọ Ọlọjé-Ògósó*  
*Ìgbà tí nfomi ojú sògbéèrè ire gbogbo*  
*Èbọ lawó ní kó şe*  
*Ìgbà tí mo şohun gbogbo tán ni mo d'onilé*  
*Ìgbà tí mo şohun gbogbo tán ni mo d'alájé*  
*Ìgbà tí mo şohun gbogbo tán ni mo d'aláya*  
*Ìgbà tí mo şohun gbogbo tán ni mo d'ọlómọ*  
*Ìgbà tí mo şohun gbogbo tán ni mo d'onire gbogbo*  
*Mo yin Ọlòbàrà, mo yin Ọsá kùndi-kùndi!*<sup>35</sup>

To you, Ọbàrà-Ọsa and all the *Irúnmọlès*, I dedicate my life achievement and my daily *Aború*, *Àboyè* and *Àboşíşe*<sup>36</sup>.

*Meine Damen und Herren, Liebe Gäste. Kollege und Kolleginnen*, this is where I close my Inaugural Lecture, thank you for coming, and for listening.

**Berlin, 19<sup>th</sup> July, 2023**

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<sup>35</sup> A rendition of an oracular content from my personal Odù Ifá, Ọbàrà-Ọsa.

<sup>36</sup> A typical salutation formula reserved for priests and practicans of the Ifá oracular tradition.

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