
Diasporic Africa

A Reader

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The Evolution of Ritual in the African Diaspora

*Central African Kilundu in Brazil, St. Domingue, and
the United States, Seventeenth–Nineteenth Centuries*

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In the 1690s in the Brazilian town of Rio Real, Bahia, a slave woman named Caterina was denounced before the Portuguese Inquisition for curing with "*ilundus*," which she said were "her relatives who died in Angola, her homeland." Caterina cured "other negras" who suffered from a variety of *ilundus* that plagued their bodies. In order to draw the spirits of her deceased ancestors to take possession of her body, Caterina ordered singing and dancing to the sounds of musical instruments known as *canzás*. Caterina was soon mounted by the spirit and entered her possession, at which time she was dressed in "the skins of wild animals" and "died on the face with a clay," known as *mpemba*. The spirit then used Caterina's body as a medium to speak "in the language of her homeland." Caterina's Angolan ancestor proffered remedies to the ailments of her clients, prompting Caterina to go off into the woods to search for the roots and herbs that would heal them.¹

Caterina's ritual and the dance that accompanied it were commonly referred to in Brazil by their Kimbundu language name, *calundu*, or *lundu* for short. In Angola, *quilundo* was a generic name for any ancestral spirit that possessed the living.² These spirits intervened in the lives of people for a variety of reasons, but usually as punishment for a lack of proper veneration and respect for ancestors. The punishment was believed to manifest itself in a variety of illnesses that could debilitate and even kill the person who was possessed. In order to have these *lundus* removed, the

sick person needed to visit a diviner/curer, or *nganga*, who would consult higher spiritual powers to learn how to remove the malevolent spirit.³

Among the observers who commented on the ceremonies conducted by the *nganga* in seventeenth-century Angola was an Italian priest, Giovanni Antonio Cavazzi. Cavazzi, who spent seventeen years in Central Africa, described the rituals of the *nganga* in the following manner:

The man or woman puts himself in the middle of the multitude and orders that all obey him. . . . Meanwhile, the musicians play their instruments and excite those present with appropriate songs and shouting, capable of frightening even the wild beasts. They sing some diabolical songs with invocations, judged efficacious for persuading the Devil to enter into the body of the person. The person, for his part, swears an oath to the Devil and invites him to take possession of him. At the sound of these supplicants, the Devil gives himself to the intervention. . . . Then the fetisher rises with great seriousness, and remaining still for several moments, suddenly begins to agitate, moving his eyes in their sockets, laying himself on the ground, contorting furiously, bending all of his members. . . . The fetisher then begins proffering extravagant words, confused and metaphorical, not without previously having forewarned those present that they are not his words, but of the spirit of the deceased . . . , whose name he then assumes, conserving [that name] until the end of the function. . . . [People] go to this possessed person because they judge that he knows everything that happens in the other life, and they use the forms of respect and reverence that they would use with a demigod, interrogating him and receiving answers as if he were the consulted spirit.⁴

The parallels between Caterina's ritual in Brazil and the one described by Cavazzi in Angola are clear. Just as in Central Africa, Caterina's Brazilian clients consulted her in the hope that she could remove the *calundus* that were causing their ailments. The use of musical instruments like the *canzá* (scraper), *atabaque* (drum), and/or *engoma* (drum) was vital to realizing Caterina's spirit possession and subsequent healing sessions. Indeed, the singing and dancing were explicitly designed to ingratiate the spirits and draw them into the ritual. Other material elements confirmed that the ancestral spirits had taken possession of Caterina. Her animal skin clothing represented a powerful vector to the spirit world, since only the highest-ranking members of Congolese and Angolan societies could wear animal skins.⁵ The *mpemba*, or white clay, applied to Caterina's face was

symbolic of the underground world of the dead. After spending six to ten months in their coffins, it was believed that the dead crossed over a large body of water (*kalunga*), where they took on the "white" appearance of the clay on the river's bottom. Hence, white clay represented benevolent spirits (as opposed to malevolent ones that roamed the earth) and was used extensively throughout Central Africa as a repellent of evil.⁶ Finally, not only were all the tools of invocation distinctly Central African, but also Caterina conducted the ritual in "the language of Angola," probably Kimbundu. Thus, the "grammar" and the substance of Caterina's ritual were clearly Central African.

This description of an Angolan divination and healing ceremony is one of many that appear in the records of seventeenth- and early eighteenth-century Brazil. There is nothing that is exemplary about the case. In fact, what is remarkable is the regularity with which similar cases occurred.⁷ Knowledge of Angolan *calundus* was widespread in Brazil, provoking commentary from a variety of observers including priests, poets, and travelers. Catholic clerics, concerned with maintaining religious orthodoxy among the Portuguese, were intolerant of the threat posed by *calundu* and therefore sought to criminalize its practice, especially when whites began consulting African *calundeiros*. In the late seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries, a steady stream of letters flowed from priests in Brazil to their superiors in Lisbon, describing the "scandalous" and "superstitious" *calundus* that were adopted by "many whites" in order to be cured of their illnesses.⁸ Poets too were inspired to comment on the "satanic" rituals of Angolans. Gregorio de Mattos, perhaps the most famous poet of colonial Brazil, wrote the following verse describing white adherents of *calundu*:

All these *quilombos*,
With peerless masters,
Teaching by night
Calundus and fetishism

Thousands of women
Attend them faithfully.

So does many a bearded man [a Portuguese]
Who thinks himself a new Narcissus.

This much I know: in these dances
Satan's an active partner.

Only the jovial master
Can teach such ecstasy.⁹

Finally, the travel narrative of a "pious pilgrim" on his way from Bahia to Minas Gerais at the beginning of the eighteenth century described his encounter with *calundus*. Stopping over one night on the property of a large slave holder, the "pilgrim" was awakened in the middle of the night by what he described as "a horrendous clamor . . . that seemed to be the confusion of hell." When he awoke the next morning, the "pilgrim" complained to his host. The slave master responded that he would order his slaves not to perform their *calundus* that evening. His curiosity piqued, the "pilgrim" asked the master, "What are *calundus*?" The master answered, "they are entertainment or divinations that the slaves are accustomed to making in their homelands . . . for learning various things, like from where illnesses arise; and for divining some lost things; and also for having luck in their hunts and agriculture; and for many other things." The "pilgrim," shocked at these revelations, scolded the master for allowing his slaves to engage in such "superstitious" rituals and urged him to burn all of the *calundu* ritual paraphernalia. The "pilgrim" also implored the master to steer his slaves toward the path of salvation, which the master dutifully did.¹⁰

Given the overwhelming presence of Central African slaves in Brazil until the 1700s, it should not surprise us that distinct rituals like *calundu* proliferated. Scholars are now suggesting that during the seventeenth century, better than 90 percent of the 560,000 slaves arriving in Brazil were from Central Africa.¹¹ These Central Africans generally held in common core understandings like religion, language, and so on. Contrary to arguments for the emergence of a "creolized" or "hybrid" African-American culture from the very beginning of the colonial experience, *calundu* and other rituals like it were Central African religion in action.¹² These understandings of *calundu* as a distinct religious ritual probably survived in Brazil well into the nineteenth century, at least among Central Africans and their immediate descendants; however, the Portuguese-language meaning of *calundu* diverged from the Kimbundu by the second half of the eighteenth century, marking a profound shift in Brazilian understandings of the term.

As the "charter generation" of most slave communities in the Portuguese colonial world, Central Africans established the idiom through which some aspects of slave culture would be understood for future gener-

ations; however, the ritual terrain of slave communities gradually became more varied and complex over the course of the eighteenth century. During the first two decades of the eighteenth century, the complexion of Brazil's slave population shifted significantly. Large numbers of slaves from the Bight of Benin arrived, especially in the Brazilian northeast.¹³ These Africans brought with them new and different rituals that ultimately expanded the Luso-Brazilian meaning of *calundu* to a form that would have been scarcely recognizable to its Central African originators. During this transitional period, Luso-Brazilians generally did not distinguish the cultural shifts that defined the interior worlds of slave communities. Instead, they fell back on the conceptual terms that were most familiar to them. Music and dance of slave communities were *calundi*; scrapers were *canzás*; and drums were *atabaques* and *engomias*, regardless of the origins of the practitioners or the substance of the rituals. Thus, certain Central African forms like *calundu* became associated with a generic form of ritual music and dance in Brazilian slave communities, at least for a brief period of time.

An examination of several cases from the second half of the eighteenth century demonstrates the nature of these shifts. As early as the 1770s, Africans from the Bight of Benin were accused of practicing *calundu*. In Lisbon in 1771, a freed black woman named Teresa de Jesus denounced Maria as a "*calunduzzeira*." In her denunciation, Teresa noted that "the same saints that they worship here, they also worship in the *calundus* of the Costa da Mina."¹⁴ This expansion of *calundu* to include Africans from the Bight of Benin effectively reduced the ritual to a generic African religious form. Similarly, in 1785, a group of six Jeje (Ewe-Fon) slaves were accused of *calundu* in Cachoeira, Brazil. Though singing and dancing were a part of the ritual, the implements used in the ceremony—a feathered arrow, coins, calabashes—were not in keeping with Central African ritual. Moreover, the language of the ritual was Ewe-Fon; not Kimbundu.¹⁵ Again, the specific meaning of *calundu* was lost, as Luso-Brazilian observers conflated Ewe-Fon ritual with the specific Central African ritual that was its historical predecessor.

Complicating matters further was the adoption of *lundu* as a popular music and dance form. Even as *calundu* became associated with African religious ritual, writ large, *lundu* emerged as increasingly palatable for white Brazilians and Portuguese alike. In 1775, Domingos Caldas Barbosa, the Brazilian-born son of an Angolan mother and a white father, performed the *lundu* in the salons of Lisbon's wealthiest elites. Barbosa's

music, and the dances that often accompanied it, were considered vulgar by some, but this criticism did not prevent *lundu* from becoming a minor sensation, even at the royal court. Most critics were silenced when Portuguese composers naturalized the musical elements of the *lundu*, rendering it more lyrical and more European in style.¹⁶ This more "refined" form of *lundu* eventually made its way back across the Atlantic to Brazil, where, by 1780, one government official in Pernambuco could claim that *lundu* was a prototypical dance of "whites and pardos," to be distinguished from the "more indecent" dances performed by Africans of various "nations."¹⁷

Lundu continued as a popular dance form in Brazil well into the nineteenth century; however, its Central African religious roots were long lost on the larger Luso-Brazilian community. When African cultural forms arrived in the Americas, they underwent changes that, over time, could render them mere shadows of what they once were. The relative stability of *calundu* in the seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries split into three different branches by the end of the eighteenth century—one generically African, one Central African, and one Luso-Brazilian. The generic African one quickly fell into disuse. By the turn of the nineteenth century, *calundu* had virtually disappeared from the Luso-Brazilian lexicon, as African dance forms were most commonly referred to as *batuques*.¹⁸ Likewise, the religious associations of *calundu* eventually merged into the more generic *candomblé*, a mixture of Yoruba, Dahomey, and Central African religious forms.¹⁹ The Central African (religious) and Luso-Brazilian (dance) understandings of *calundu/lundu* probably operated in parallel fashion into the nineteenth century. There seems little doubt that the Central African form of *kilundu* survived in Brazil, especially in the southeast. Mary Karasch has shown that at least two-thirds of the Africans in Rio de Janeiro during the nineteenth century were from West Central Africa.²⁰ And slave trade data suggest that as many as 84 percent of those arriving into Rio between 1776 and 1825 were of Central African descent.²¹ Given the continued dominance of Central Africans in the slave populations of southeast Brazil, it seems unlikely that *kilundu* simply disappeared. Rather, the religious basis for the ritual remained hidden behind understandings of it as a Luso-Brazilian dance form that turned "lascivious" when danced by Africans and their descendants. Ultimately, the Portuguese-language transformation of *lundu* rendered it a spiritually impotent homophone of the Kimbundu version. Central Africans may have continued to refer to these rituals as *kilundu* among one another; however, *candomblé* became the preferred way of describing African reli-

gious rituals in Portuguese. Ultimately, *calundu* lost nearly all of the distinct Central African religious meaning that it had in its original form in seventeenth-century Brazil.

These transformations in the meanings of *calundu* have had a profound impact on interpretations of culture in Brazilian slave communities, obscuring scholarly understandings of the Central African influences. Though there are sometimes vague understandings that *calundu* had "Bantu" or "Angolan" origins, there is little specificity as to exactly what these origins were or how the rituals connected to Angola.²² In many cases, Central Africa is completely erased. Several scholars conclude that the origins and definition of *calundu* are "unclear" or "imprecise."²³ Others, who claim to "accentuate the African origins of popular religion," ignore specific African belief systems altogether, emphasizing *calundu* as a peculiarly Brazilian form.²⁴ Still others "tentatively" accept colonial references to "Ewe (Jeje) *calundus*," cautioning that analyses of African rituals are "approximations," since "African religions transformed themselves over the centuries of slavery and colonialism."²⁵

Indeed, it seems that much of the confusion over the definition of *calundu* arises from the chronological limitations of the scholarship. Most of those who study the eighteenth century recognize the religious importance of the ritual, but are confused by the variations in the "*calundus*" performed by "Angolas," "Minas," and "Jejes." This was precisely the period when the ritual was becoming generically "African," at least in Luso-Brazilian eyes. Scholars of the nineteenth century often see only the musical and dance aspects of the ritual in Brazilian slave communities. Thus, *lundu* is interpreted as "a dance tradition from the eastern hinterland of Luanda," with no hint of the ritual's religious underpinnings.²⁶ Such conclusions are understandable given that the *lundu* had metamorphosed into a mere dance form in nineteenth-century Brazil. The extant documentary record leaves no hint that *lundu* was anything other than a form of entertainment during that period.

The lessons to be learned from longitudinal examinations of specific rituals reveal a great deal about the *process* of creolization and the emergence of African-American culture. To begin with, all inquiries must necessarily start in Africa. Given the advanced state of scholarship on slavery and the slave trade, it is no longer acceptable for scholars to assume that African-American culture begins in the Americas.²⁷ At the same time, scholars are increasingly aware that the idea of a linear progression of culture from Africa to the Americas is a slippery conceptual slope. Because of

warfare, trade, and other forms of human exchange, few parts of Africa were ever culturally or ethnically homogeneous. In the case of Central Africa, "ethnic" signifiers like "Ndembu" and "Ngangela" were very likely products of the slave trade. The peoples who constituted these "ethnic" groups were exiles who fled warfare, famine, and misery to create new peoples in Central Africa during the seventeenth century.²⁸ Thus, the "Dembo" and "Ganguela" that appear in Brazilian documents are not indicators of "traditional" African societies with deep historical or cultural roots. On the contrary, these ethnic designations are indicators of marginal and uprooted status, even in Africa. Brazil represented just one more stop in an arduous and unstable journey where cultural exchange was the norm. Generic rituals like *kilundu* functioned as an anchor of a broadly shared identity, one that emphasized the power of the dead and the importance of ancestor veneration. These beliefs were commonly held across Central Africa, making *kilundu* attractive to numerous Central African peoples, both in Africa and in the Americas.

On the surface, the process of "Africanization" that began in Africa might be seen as destabilizing any claims for the direct retention of African forms in the Americas. But it was precisely the survival of rituals like *calundu*, as well as the accompanying languages, dances, musical instruments, and other implements that illustrate the tenacity of broadly conceived "Central African" cultural forms. During the seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries, the preponderance of Central Africans in Brazilian slave communities resulted in a slave culture that was not peculiarly Brazilian. But nor was it tied to any particular African ethnic group. Rather, Brazilian slave culture is best characterized as "Central African," defined, in part, by a lingua franca like Kimbundu and religious rituals like *calundu*. Only over time were these elements transformed into something that was considered even more broadly "African." In some cases, as with *calundu*, African forms never did become distinctly "Afro-Brazilian." They were either absorbed into other African forms (*batuque*, *candomblé*) or they were coopted and made new by the colonial power brokers (*lundu*).

The implications of Central African cultural transformation and loss extend well beyond Brazil. Despite constituting nearly 45 percent of all Africans imported to the Americas during the era of the slave trade, Central Africans have largely been ignored in the scholarship on slave culture. Linda Heywood argues that because of the mixed Afro-European cultural heritage of the region, "the Central African input into Afro-Diasporic tra-

ditions may have been less dramatic and visible than the Yoruba and Fon elements, which appeared more African (exotic) to researchers and thus merited more attention.²⁹ Heywood's argument certainly goes a long way toward explaining the absence of Central Africa in studies of slave culture.³⁰ However, one might also posit that, even where more "exotic" Central African rituals (like *kilundu*) arrived in the Americas, the malleability of the rituals ultimately allowed them to be hidden or subsumed by a larger "African" or creolized culture.

In the case of *kilundu*, there seems to be some tantalizing evidence of its survival and transformation in places as seemingly far-flung as St. Domingue and the United States. Much of this evidence is circumstantial. As such, I merely hope to raise questions and speculate about possible connections between Central Africa and the diaspora beyond Brazil. Admittedly, I do not have a command of the pertinent archival sources for these other regions of the Americas; however, I hope that these suggestions might chart a path for others to follow.

On mission in St. Domingue and other French colonies in the Caribbean in the late 1690s, Dominican priest, Père Labat, was a keen observer of the customs and practices of the African slaves he encountered. Among the "dances" that he described was one known as "*calenda*":

They have passed laws in the islands to prevent the *calendas*, not only because of the indecent and lascivious postures that make up this dance, but especially to prevent too many blacks from assembling and who, finding themselves gathered together in joy and usually inebriated, are capable of revolts, insurrections or raids. But despite these laws and all of the precautions the masters take, [*calenda*] is almost impossible to suppress, because of all the diversions, this is the one [the slaves] enjoy the most and the one to which they are most sensitive.³¹

Though Labat makes no reference to the potential religiosity of these dances, he makes clear that the master class considered the dances a threat to public order. Indeed, an ordinance of 1704 forbade slaves from "gathering at night under the pretext of holding collective dances." Shortly thereafter a planter was fined 300 livres for having allowed a *calenda* on his property. Finally, in 1765 a military outfit, The First Legion of St. Domingue, was created for the specific purpose of "breaking up Negro gatherings and *calendas*."³²

Though the precise derivation of the word *calenda* remains unclear, anthropologist, Alfred Métraux, concludes that it "must certainly have meant Voodoo."³³ Historian, Carolyn Fick, also argues that *calenda* "sometimes served as a cover for voodoo gatherings."³⁴ The description of African religious practices in colonial St. Domingue as "voodoo" is probably anachronistic and ahistorical. Voodoo was a product of post-slave-trade Haiti that continued to transform itself, even in the aftermath of the Haitian Revolution. Nevertheless, both Métraux and Fick were probably on target in describing *calenda* as essentially religious. I would suggest that a deeper inquiry might reveal that *calenda* was, in fact, derived from *kilundu*.

Not only are there obvious linguistic similarities between the two words, but also the physical description of the *calenda* ritual is strikingly similar to *kilundu*. Labat described *calenda* as follows:

To dance the *calenda*, the Negroes make two drums, when possible from the hollow trunk of a single piece of tree. One end is open and they stretch over the other a skin of sheep or nanny-goat. The shorter of these drums is called Bamboula, because it is sometimes made out of very thick bamboo. Astride each drum is a Negro who strikes it with his wrists and fingers, but slowly for one and rapidly for the other. To this monotone and hollow sound is joined a number of . . . calabashes half filled with small stones, or with grains of corn. . . . When they wish to make the orchestra more complete, they add the Banza, a kind of Bass viol with four strings that they pluck. The Negresses, arranged in a circle, regulate the tempo by clapping their hands, and they reply in chorus to one or two chanters whose piercing voice repeats or improvises ditties. For the Negroes possess the talent of improvising, and it gives them an opportunity for displaying especially their tendency to banter. The dancers, male and female, . . . come to the middle of a circle (which is formed on even ground and in the open air) and they begin to dance. . . . This dance, which has its origin on Mt. Atlas, and which offers little variation, consists of a movement where each foot is raised and lowered successively, striking with force, sometimes the toe and sometimes the heel, on the ground, in a way quite similar to the English step. The dancer turns on himself or around his partner who turns also, and changes place, waving the two ends of a handkerchief that they hold. The dancer lowers and raises alternatively his arms, while keeping the elbows near the body, and the hand almost closed. This dance in which the play of the eyes is nothing less than extraordinary, is lively and animated, and an exact im-

ing lends it real grace. The dancers follow each other with emulation, and it is often necessary to put an end to the ball, which the Negroes never abandon without regret.³⁵

The symbolic elements of the ritual reveal its likely Central African origin. First, the use of two drums is very similar to the use of larger and smaller drums in Central Africa. In Kimbundu and Kikongo, these drums are known as *ngoma* (the larger) and *atabaque* (the smaller). Interestingly, Labat described the smaller drum as a "Bamboula." *Bamboula* is a Kikongo word that means "violin." Either Labat was mistaken in his nomenclature or the names were transformed in the Domingois context. His description of the "Banza" as a violin, however, was on target. In Kimbundu, the violin was *mбанза*, a word that some have argued is the origin of the word "banjo."³⁶ Second, the "Negresses in a circle" is reflective of the posture taken in *kilundu* rituals. The counterclockwise movement around the circle, in conjunction with the clapping, singing, chanting, and "banter," was all designed to invoke the spirits. Finally, Labat's description of a "dance in which the play of the eyes is nothing less than extraordinary" seems highly suggestive of the trance state that was the culmination of *kilundu* ceremonies.

Clearly, there are elements in Labat's description of the *calenda* dance that suggest little more than entertainment or diversion, but the obvious references to Central African musical instruments, along with other ritual coincidences, would suggest a dance that had its derivation in Central African *kilundu*. The cultural flux that erased the ritual's more overt religious aspects was perhaps similar to the process of transformation that the *kilundu* would later undergo in Brazil. Or, perhaps Labat simply failed to notice the ritual aspects of the dance. Labat's reference to the dance taking place "on even ground and in the open air" would seem to affirm Sterling Stuckey's argument that "since African dance was observed in settings thought inappropriate for worship, the sacred was thereby disguised."³⁷ Either way, Central African influence in *calenda* is manifest in Labat's description and seems to point to a religious rather than a secular origin.

In the United States, one finds ritual descriptions similar to *kilundu* in the "ring shout" ceremonies of slave communities. The majority of scholarship on "ring shout" concentrates on the second half of the nineteenth century, a period when most slaves had already become firmly "African American." As such, scholars point to the ring shout's mixed cultural her-

itage—West and Central African—as a signal contribution to the emergence of African-American religion and culture. In his path-breaking book, *Slave Culture*, Sterling Stuckey writes, "the ring in which Africans danced and sang is the key to understanding the means by which they achieved oneness in America."³⁸ Still, Stuckey emphasizes the Central African contribution when he writes that the "circle ritual imported by Africans from the Congo region was so powerful in its elaboration of a religious vision that it contributed disproportionately to the centrality of the circle in slavery."³⁹

This "disproportionate" influence of Central Africa in African-American religion and culture is difficult to pinpoint. Building on the work of Robert F. Thompson, Stuckey draws attention to the symbolic importance of counterclockwise, circular dancing in Bakongo burial ceremonies and "ancestral ritual," but in *Slave Culture* he fails to move far beyond the symbolism of the ring itself in African-American religious rituals.⁴⁰ In one of his most recent works, however, Stuckey goes back in time to the eighteenth century and shows more clearly the Central African influence on rituals in upstate New York.

Stuckey describes the rituals of Africans at the annual Pinkster festival in Albany, New York, focusing particularly on one slave man named Charley. Charley was brought to New York from "Angola" as a young child, probably in the first decade of the eighteenth century. In Albany, Charley became a master dancer and drummer. As he drummed, Charley also sang in "some strange African air."⁴¹ Much later in his life, around the age of seventy, Charley acted as the "king" in rituals that included drumming and dancing in the middle of a ring of other dancers. According to one description of this ritual, the drummer beat

lustily with his naked hands upon its loudly sounding head, successively repeating the ever wild, though euphonic cry of *Hi-a-bomba, bomba, bomba*, in full harmony with the thumping sounds. These vocal sounds were taken up and as oft repeated by the female portion of the spectators not otherwise engaged in the exercises of the scene. . . . Merrily now the dance moved on . . . rapid and furious became their motions . . . copiously flowed the perspiration, in frequent streams, from brow to head, and still the dance went on in all of its energy and might.⁴²

Building on Stuckey's suggestion that these dances were forums for spirit possession, I want to suggest ways that the rituals of the Pinkster fes-

tival were related to Central African culture, especially *kilundu*.⁴³ First, the “strange African air” that Charley sang in was probably Kikongo or Kimbundu. Given Charley’s “Angolan” background, we might immediately draw this conclusion, but we can also look to the cry of “*Hi-a-bomba, bomba, bomba*” in the ring dance ritual. Though the evidence is admittedly cryptic, one might suggest “*bomba*” is a reference to Mbumba, the Kongolesse rainbow spirit. In eighteenth-century St. Domingue, a similar chant of “*Eh! eh! Bomba, hen! hen!*” was used in rituals that were clearly Kongolesse in origin.⁴⁴

Second, Charley’s role as “king” of the Pinkster festival may have been a carnivalesque inversion of the social order, but it was also deeply resonant with Central African practices. The Kongolesse adopted many of the symbols of Portuguese kingship—titles/hierarchies of nobility, crowns, dress, and so on—by as early as the sixteenth century. Thus, European-style kingship was naturalized in Central Africa very early in the colonial period. At the same time, Kongolesse kings were understood to be far more than political leaders. Kings were situated atop a hierarchy of ritual experts who mediated between the worlds of the living and the dead.⁴⁵ As those who were closest to the recently deceased, only elders rivaled the king in his ability to access the powers of the dead.⁴⁶ As the personification of both the king and the elder in the Pinkster festival, Charley represented the most powerful spiritual force in his community. Thus, it should come as no surprise that African-descended peoples paid “homage to the [Pinkster] king,” holding him “in awe and reverence as an African prince.”⁴⁷

Finally, Charley’s dance in the middle of the ring was probably the forum where he actually received spirits from the other world. As noted above, in *kilundu* ceremonies in Central Africa and Brazil, the song and dance of invocation culminated with the spirit mounting the medium and the medium taking on the traits of the spirit while in the trance state. These traits could include a different voice or a new form of dress. It was not unusual for the medium to be mounted by a former Central African king, even in *calundu* ceremonies in Brazil.⁴⁸ Though Charley apparently donned the king’s attire of a scarlet coat and yellow trousers before the ring dance, this slight shift in choreography should not divert our attention from his role at the center of the ring dance ritual, the privileged position of the spiritually powerful medium.

In the final analysis, it is very difficult to determine whether Central African *kilundu* survived in St. Domingue or the United States in quite the

same way as it did in Brazil. Certainly, there was never the critical mass of Central Africans in either of those places that there was in Brazil.⁴⁹ Nevertheless, we can be sure that certain Central African religious influences in the diaspora emanated from a broadly conceived ritual understanding that emphasized, among other things, singing to musical instruments of Central African origin, dancing in counterclockwise formation, veneration of ancestors, and spirit possession—in short, *kilundu*. The key to understanding how these ritual elements evolved into distinctly African-American forms can be determined only through close study of American slave ritual over the *longue durée*. As the Brazilian case shows, ritual meaning can be obscured and erased over the passage of time. When examined over short periods, rituals like *calundu*, *calenda*, and the ring shout appear as little more than historical snapshots, moments in time isolated from their historical pasts and the forces that contributed to their change. By beginning in Africa and tracing change over time and space, we not only see more clearly the elements of African survival, but more important, we better understand the ebbs and flows that led to the formation of African American culture in the Americas.

NOTES

1. Arquivo Nacional do Torre de Tombo (ANTT), Inquisição de Lisboa (II), Cadernos do Promotor No. 67, Livro 261, ff. 311–320v.
2. Giovanni Antonio Cavazzi, *Descrição Histórica*, 1:209.
3. See Bishop Luiz Simões Brandão, “Ritos gentílicos, e superstições, que observão os negros do gentio do Reyno de Angola desde o seu nascimento athe a morte,” in *Boletim da Sociedade de Geografia de Lisboa* 5–6 (Lisbon, 1885): 371–373.
4. Cavazzi, *Descrição Histórica*, 1:204–205.
5. See, for instance, Filippo Pigafetta and Duarte Lopes, *Description du Royaume de Congo et des contrées environnantes* (Louvain, Éditions Nauwelaerts, 1963), 118.
6. Anita Jacobson-Widding, *Red-White-Black as Mode of Thought: A Study of Triadic Classification of Colours in the Ritual Symbolism and Cognitive Thought of the Peoples of the Lower Congo* (Uppsala, Almqvist and Wiksell International, 1979), 50.
7. Accusations of *calundu* appear with some frequency in Inquisition cases. See, for instance, James H. Sweet, *Recreating Africa: Culture, Kinship, and Religion in the African-Portuguese World, 1441–1770* (Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 2003); Laura de Mello e Souza, *O diabo e a terra de Santa Cruz: feitiçaria e religiosidade popular no Brasil colonial* (São Paulo: Companhia das

Letras, 1986), 263–269; and Luiz Mott, “O calundu Angola de Luzia Pinta: Sabará, 1739,” *Revista do Instituto de Artes e Cultura* 1 (1994): 73–82.

8. See for instance, ANTT, IL, Cadernos do Promotor No. 59, Livro 256, ff. 130–130v. (1685); ANTT, IL, Cadernos do Promotor No. 82, Livro 275, ff. 421–422 (1715); ANTT, IL, Cadernos do Promotor No. 83, Livro 276, ff. 202 (1715).

9. As quoted from Mattos, in Roger Bastide, *The African Religions of Brazil* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1978), 134–135.

10. Nuno Marques Pereira, *Compendio Narrativo do Peregrino da America*, 6th edition, 2 vols. (Rio de Janeiro, Publicações da Academia Brasileira 1939), 1:123–126.

11. Although most scholars agree on the proportion of Central Africans that arrived in Brazil during the seventeenth century, there is some disagreement on the total number of slave arrivals. David Eltis concludes that 327,000 Africans arrived in Brazil. See Eltis, “The Volume and Structure of the Transatlantic Slave Trade: A Reassessment,” *William and Mary Quarterly* 58 (2001), 17–46. Eltis’s figures have been contested by Luiz Felipe de Alencastro, who provides a “conservative” estimate of 560,000 arrivals. I find Alencastro’s arguments to be more convincing. Alencastro, *O Trato dos Viventes: a formação do Brasil no Atlântico Sul, séculos XVI e XVII* (Rio de Janeiro, Companhia das Letras, 2000), 375–380.

12. The most prominent articulation of the “rapid creolization” model is Sidney Mintz and Richard Price, *The Birth of African-American Culture: An Anthropological Perspective* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1992). Price has retreated somewhat on the speed of the creolization process in some places; however, as the title of his recent article indicates, he continues to see the broader American experience as an exceptional, even “miraculous,” break from various African pasts. Price, “The Miracle of Creolization: A Retrospective,” *New West Indian Guide/Nieuwe West-Indische Gids* 75 (2001): 35–64.

13. During the first two decades of the eighteenth century, slave exports from the Slave Coast to Brazil surpassed those from Central Africa 153,000 to 129,000. See David Richardson, “Slave Exports from West and West-Central Africa, 1700–1810,” *Journal of African History* 30 (1989): 7–22.

14. ANTT, IL, Cadernos do Promotor No. 129, Livro 318.

15. João José Reis, “Magia Jeje na Bahia: A Invasão do Calundu do Pasto de Cachoeira, 1785,” *Revista Brasileira de História* 8 (1988): 57–81.

16. José Ramos Tinhorão, *Pequena história da música popular* (São Paulo: Art Editora, 1986), 49. Also see Mary Karasch, *Slave Life in Rio de Janeiro, 1808–1850* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1987), 243.

17. As quoted in Tinhorão, *Os Negros em Portugal: uma presença silenciosa* (Lisbon: Editorial Caminho, 1988), 362–363.

18. For more detail on the development of *batuque*, see chapter 2 by João José Reis in this volume.

19. For a provocative rendering of the contribution of *calundu* to *candomblé*,

see Rachel E. Harding, *A Refuge in Thunder: Candomblé and Alternative Spaces of Blackness* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2000), 111.

20. Karasch, *Slave Life*, 15.

21. David Eltis, et al., *The Trans-Atlantic Slave Trade: A Database on CD-ROM* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999).

22. One notable exception is Mott, “O calundu Angola de Luzia Pinta.”

23. Mello e Souza, *O diabo e a terra*, 265; Daniela Buono Calainho, “Jambousses e Gangazambes: feitiços negros em Portugal,” *Afro-Ásia* 25–26 (2001): 161.

24. Donald Ramos, “A Influência Africana e a Cultura Popular em Minas Gerais: Um Comentário Sobre a Interpretação da Escravidão,” in Maria Beatriz Nizza da Silva, ed., *Brasil: Colonização e Escravidão* (Rio de Janeiro: Editora Nova Fronteira, 1999), 142–162.

25. Reis, “Magia Jeje na Bahia,” 59.

26. Karasch, *Slave Life*, 244.

27. For a critique of this approach, see Paul E. Lovejoy, “The African Diaspora: Revisionist Interpretations of Ethnicity, Culture and Religion under Slavery,” *Studies in the World History of Slavery, Abolition, and Emancipation* 2 (1997): 1–23.

28. Joseph C. Miller, “Central Africa During the Era of the Slave Trade, c. 1490s–1850s,” in Linda M. Heywood, ed., *Central Africans and Cultural Transformations in the American Diaspora* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), 46–47.

29. Heywood, “Introduction,” in Heywood, *Central Africans and Cultural Transformations*, 13.

30. Heywood especially emphasizes the Catholic influences in Central Africa. For a more expansive discussion of Central African Catholicism in the Americas, see the essays by John Thornton, Hein Vanhee, and Terry Rey in Heywood, *Central Africans and Cultural Transformations*. Also see Thornton, “On the Trail of Voodoo: African Christianity in Africa and the Americas,” *The Americas* 55 (1998): 161–178; “I am the Subject of the King of Kongo: African Political Ideology and the Haitian Revolution,” *Journal of World History* 3 (1993): 181–214; and “African Roots of the Stono Rebellion,” *American Historical Review* 96 (1991): 1101–1113.

31. Labat, as quoted in Hénoek Trouillot, *Introduction à une histoire du Vaudou* (Port-au-Prince: Imp. De Antilles, 1970), 84.

32. Alfred Métraux, *Voodoo in Haiti* (New York: Shocken Books, 1972), 32–33.

33. *Ibid.*, 33.

34. Carolyn E. Fick, *The Making of Haiti: The Saint Domingue Revolution from Below* (Knoxville, TN: University of Tennessee Press, 1990), 41.

35. Pere Labat, *Nouveau Voyage aux Îles de l’Amérique*, vol. 2, 51.

36. Nel Lopes, *Dicionário Banto do Brasil* (Rio de Janeiro: Imprensa da Cidade, 1996), 43.

Part II

Memory and Instantiations of the Divine

37. Sterling Stuckey, "African Spirituality and Cultural Practice in Colonial New York, 1700–1770," in Carla Gardina Pestana and Sharon V. Salinger, eds., *Inequality in Early America* (Hanover, NH: University Press of New England, 1999), 163.

38. Sterling Stuckey, *Slave Culture: Nationalist Theory and the Foundations of Black America* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1987), 12. For a fine description of the process of change from African identities to African American identity, also see Michael A. Gomez, *Exchanging Our Country Marks: The Transformation of African Identities in the Colonial and Antebellum South* (Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 1998).

39. Stuckey, *Slave Culture*, 11.

40. *Ibid.*, 12–13.

41. Joel Munsell, *Collections of Albany* (Albany, NY, 1856), 56, as quoted in Stuckey, "African Spirituality in Colonial New York," 169.

42. James Eights, "Pinkster Festivities in Albany," in *Readings in Black American Music* (New York, 1971), 41, as quoted in Stuckey, "African Spirituality in Colonial New York," 172. Eights' original essay was published in 1867.

43. Stuckey, "African Spirituality in Colonial New York," 173.

44. Carolyn Fick makes a forceful argument that the chant was Kongolese, but then she concludes that the attendant rituals were "voodoo." See Fick, *The Making of Haiti*, 57–58. Original from M.E.L. Moreau de St. Mery, *Description topographique . . .* (Philadelphia, 1797).

45. See Wyatt MacGaffey, *Kongo Political Culture: The Conceptual Challenge of the Particular* (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 2000).

46. In the Kongolese vision of the cosmos, the elderly have attained the greatest knowledge in the temporal world and are at the cusp of entering the world of the dead. They continue moving in a circular motion around the "Kongo cosmogram" until they are reborn. On Kongolese cosmology, see Wyatt MacGaffey, *Religion and Society in Central Africa* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1986). Also see Robert Farriss Thompson, *Flash of the Spirit: African and Afro-American Art and Philosophy* (New York: Vintage Books, 1984), 108–116.

47. Stuckey, "African Spirituality in Colonial New York," 171.

48. See, for instance, ANTT, IL, Cadernos do Promotor No. 91, Livro 284, ff. 41–41v.

49. Although it should be noted that after 1750, Central Africans constituted roughly 60 percent of slave imports into St. Domingue. See Eltis, *Trans-Atlantic Slave Trade: A Database*.

This section engages the question of religion and the African diaspora, interrogating the multiple ideas of both spirituality and organized religious traditions. The section stretches the spatial framework of issues to be considered, extending from North America to the contemporary Middle East.

Jermaine Archer begins by demonstrating a functional, African-derived spirituality that informed the lives and decisions of the foremost anti-slavery leaders a generation or two removed from African soil. He argues for a cultural transfer that is ongoing but malleable, even unrecognized; his use of slave narratives represents a fresh and innovative reading. Confining the analysis to North America, Archer examines the so-called radical ex-slave narratives from the 1830s through the 1860s, and argues for an "African cultural memory" that is discernible even in those works avowing agnosticism with respect to African antecedents and influences. Taking the secondary literature to task for not recognizing African cultural motifs in these narratives, Archer identifies the constitutive elements of African cultural memory and then locates those elements in the work of Frederick Douglass, William Wells Brown, Harriet Tubman, Harriet Jacobs, Henry Bibb, and others. The case for Douglass and Tubman is particularly striking, as the former's classic struggle with the overseer Covey is reconsidered in light of Douglass's prior consultation with a root worker. The chapter is an effective example of mining well-known texts for heretofore undiscovers insights and is testimony to the benefits of the close read.

Diane Batts Morrow continues with a consideration of the Oblate Sisters of Providence, a Roman Catholic sisterhood that constitutes the first such community made up exclusively of women of African descent. With its origins reaching back to the late eighteenth century, the Oblate sisterhood was officially chartered in Baltimore in 1829. Batts Morrow argues that although ostensibly a Roman Catholic order, values associated with