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Black Brotherhoods in North America: Afro-Iberian and West-Central African Influences

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Abstract: Building on the acknowledgement that many Africans, predominantly in West-Central Africa, had already adopted certain Portuguese cultural and religious elements before they were shipped to the Americas as slaves, this article argues that syncretic Afro-Iberian elements must also have existed among slave communities outside of the Iberian realm in the American diaspora. It explores this possibility with a focus on Afro-Iberian brotherhoods. While it was long assumed that these so-called "black brotherhoods" were associated with slave culture on the Iberian Peninsula and in Latin America only, it can now be confirmed that Afro-Catholic fraternities also flourished in parts of Africa during the Atlantic slave trade era. A comparative analysis of king celebrations in Afro-Iberian brotherhoods with those at Pinkster and Election Day festivals in New York and New England reveals a surprising number of parallels, which leads to the conclusion that these African-American performances may have been rooted in Afro-Iberian traditions brought to North America by the Charter Generations.

Introduction

When Johan Maurits of Nassau, Governor-General of Dutch Brazil (1630-54), sent out expeditions against the maroons of Palmares, he was informed by his intelligence officers that the inhabitants followed the "Portuguese religion," that they had erected a church in the capital, that there were chapels with images of saints and the Virgin Mary and that Zumbi, the king of Palmares, did not allow the presence of "fetishists." Portuguese sources confirm that Palmares had a priest who baptized children and married couples and that its inhabitants followed Catholic rite, although according to Governor Francisco de Brito, they did so "in a stupid fashion."[1]

Many more examples of the existence of Afro-Catholic elements in maroon communities in Latin America can be found. They question the widespread assumption that Catholicism had been forced upon all African slaves and that, even among those who seemingly embraced the colonizer's faith, and that it functioned merely as a veneer underneath which their truly

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African, indigenous beliefs remained hidden. As the case of Palmares indicates, slaves did not necessarily wish to liberate themselves from all "Catholic ballast" once they ran away but sometimes remained strongly attached to it.[2]

This conclusion corresponds to the assumption by the Brazilian historian Marina de Mello e Souza that upon arrival in the Americas, many slaves did not perceive Catholic elements as something foreign since "Catholicism represented a link to their native Africa."[3] Souza is but one of several scholars who in recent years contributed to a shift in the study of black performance culture in the New World. The new paradigm essentially consists in the acknowledgment that our understanding of black performance culture can be bettered if we take into consideration that many Africans had already adopted certain European—predominantly Portuguese—cultural and religious elements before they were shipped as slaves to the Americas.

In the context of this shift, there has been an increased interest in Afro-Iberian brotherhoods (*irmandades/hermandades*) and confraternities (*confrarias/cofradías*). While it was long assumed that these so-called "black brotherhoods" were associated with slave culture on the Iberian Peninsula and in Latin America only, it can now be confirmed that Afro-Catholic fraternities also flourished in parts of Africa during the Atlantic slave trade era. As Linda Heywood has argued, "many Kongos and not a few Angolans had been Christians before their enslavement in Brazil. Thus they would have been familiar with the brotherhoods in Luanda, Soyo, and Kongo, and the central role they played in the creole society of Kongo, Angola and São Tomé."[4] Nicole von Germeten's research on black brotherhoods in Mexico also concluded that "some Central Africans probably took part in social and religious brotherhoods and sisterhoods before crossing the Atlantic."[5]

Ira Berlin also observed that black brotherhoods played a crucial role in the intercontinental networks that developed in the context of the transatlantic slavery. However, like most scholars, Berlin perceives brotherhoods as an essentially Iberian phenomenon that was crucial to the development of black identity in the Iberian World, differing from that in North America, where "numerous informal connections between black people" developed, but not brotherhoods. Although Berlin confirms that slaves "created an intercontinental web of *cofradias* … so that, by the seventeenth century, the network of black religious brotherhoods stretched from Lisbon to São Tomé, Angola, and Brazil," he believes that those slaves who ended up in Dutch, French or English colonies refrained from developing brotherhoods since there were no "comparable institutional linkages" that allowed them to do so.[6] Berlin's assumption thus presupposes that brotherhoods could only be established with institutional support and excludes the possibility that slaves themselves may have taken the initiative to create such organizations.

This article questions this conclusion and explores the possibility that slave organizations modeled upon Iberian brotherhoods have existed in North America. In doing so, it follows the reasoning of Jorge Cañizares-Esguerra, Matt Childs, and James Sidbury, according to whom "approved institutional structures authorized by the Catholic Church were not always necessary for Africans and their descendants to build fraternal structures."[7] A first section provides an overview of the characteristics of Afro-Iberian slave brotherhoods. The following section presents a comparative analysis between king celebrations in Afro-Iberian brotherhoods

and those at African-American Election Day and Pinkster festivals in New England and New York. The article ends with a reflection on the origins of Afro-Iberian cultural and religious elements among slave communities outside of the Iberian realm in the American diaspora.

Black Brotherhoods

Since the European Middle Ages, Catholic lay brotherhoods played a crucial role in Iberian culture. These brotherhoods were dedicated to either a Catholic saint or to the Virgin Mary and annually celebrated the day dedicated to their patron. Traditionally, the festivities of the brotherhood's patron coincided with the election of the new board. This was accompanied by a banquet offered by the brotherhood's leader to all members. Each brotherhood had its own regulations for membership, and the type of brotherhood one adhered to corresponded to one's standing in society. Certain brotherhoods consisted exclusively of members of aristocratic families, while others were restricted to members of certain professional corporations or to inhabitants of certain neighborhoods. Even marginalized groups such as beggars and the blind sometimes had their own brotherhoods. Following a European medieval procedure for dealing with potentially troublesome minority groups, the authorities expected the leaders of such brotherhoods to act as representatives of the entire group and held them accountable for acts of misconduct by their members. In urban centers with large African slave populations such as Lisbon, Cadiz, and Seville, so-called "black brotherhoods" developed, composing free blacks and slaves. The type of black brotherhood to which slaves adhered usually corresponded to their origin or "nation," generally named after the place or region in Africa from where they had been shipped, such as (São Jorge da) Mina, Mozambique, or Angola.

In Portugal and Portuguese colonies, most black brotherhoods were associated with Our Lady of the Rosary. Founded in the German city of Cologne in the fifteenth century, this brotherhood had been promoted by Jakob Sprenger (1435-1495), who in his role as inquisitor considered it an ideal instrument to combat pre-Christian traditions related to witchcraft and the worshipping of ancestors. Sprenger, therefore, dedicated considerable attention to fraternal solidarity between the dead and the living and opened the brotherhood to the poorest of the poor without regard to ethnicity, gender or social status: "[I]n our brotherhood no one will be kept out, no matter how poor he may be; but rather the poorer he is, the more disdained, and despised, the more acceptable, beloved, and precious will he be in this brotherhood."[8]

The brotherhood of Our Lady of the Rosary arrived in Lisbon in the late fifteenth century, where it soon became associated with the city's black population. Although originally a racially mixed brotherhood for blacks and poor whites, the black community eventually separated and formed the exclusively black *Irmandade da Nossa Senhora do Rosário dos Homens Pretos* (Brotherhood of Our Lady of the Rosary of the Black Men) in 1565. By the end of the sixteenth century, there were at least nine black brotherhoods in Portugal, most of them dedicated to Our Lady of the Rosary.[9]

Black brotherhoods possessed a hierarchal structure, in which European aristocratic and military titles were used. This strict hierarchy was accompanied by a democratic decision-making process. For instance, Chapter XXVI of the 1565 charter of the black brotherhood of Our Lady of the Rosary in Lisbon stipulated that members wishing to be designated as prince, count, judge, treasurer, superintendent, scribe, administrator, and king had to submit their

request to an electoral commission. The kings of black brotherhoods usually served influential masters and expected the latter to support the annual celebration of the brotherhood.

Membership in a brotherhood was not the choice of a small minority, but rather the general rule. This is not surprising considering that brotherhoods strengthened black solidarity, enabled the maintenance or construction of a collective identity, provided a mutual-aid system in order to care for the needy, and secured a minimal social mobility that, in exceptional cases, could lead to manumission. In fact, the collection of money to liberate brothers and sisters from the bonds of slavery was one of the main goals of black brotherhoods. Moreover, brotherhoods functioned as a means of cultural affirmation as they provided blacks with a chance to have their own chapels, to participate in processions with their own performances, to have Masses for the souls of the living and dead members and to make sure that members received an honorable funeral and burial place. The participation at processions and subsequent festivities during which collections were held and booths sold food and drinks served as an important source of income for black brotherhoods. Other forms of revenue were dues, donations, the collection of alms, the organization of (paid) funeral marches, and testaments. Typically, members would donate jewelry to embellish the statues of the brotherhood's patron saint or the Virgin Mary. Not surprisingly, thus, black brotherhoods were often accused by slaveholders of handling stolen goods.

King celebrations and processions primarily occurred on holidays that were intimately related to the black community such as the feast day of Saint Iphigenia, a former Nubian Princess (September 21), that of the Sicilian St. Benedict—*il Moro*—whose parents had been African slaves (October 5), and of Our Lady of the Rosary (first Sunday in October). Other important holidays for black brotherhoods were Corpus Christi, Epiphany, Easter, Pentecost, All Saints' Day, All Souls' Day, St. John's Day (June 23), and St. James' Day (July 25).

Brotherhoods played an important role in Portugal's missionary policy in the context of its colonial expansion. The first black brotherhood in Africa, dedicated to Our Lady of the Rosary, was established in the year 1495 on Santiago, one of the islands of the Cape Verde archipelago.[10] The impact of this brotherhood on local performance culture was considerable. Documents indicate that in the mid-eighteenth century it was still common to see "gatherings of the kings of the brotherhood of the Rosary" on Santiago and that "in all neighborhoods of the island women and men were elected to serve as kings and queens, who every Sunday and holiday stage parades with their drums and flutes in order to collect money."[11] From the Cape Verde islands, a Luso-African Creole culture developed on the nearby West African coast. There, so-called *lançados* established relationships with local women and spread a syncretic form of African Catholicism. Closely related to these communities were those of the Kristons or Grumetes, Africans who had converted to Catholicism and adopted a Luso-African lifestyle. According to Gerhard Seibert, "their communities were organized on the basis of Catholic brotherhoods [that] celebrated Catholic feasts and provided members in need."[12]

In 1526, a second black brotherhood, also dedicated to Our Lady of the Rosary, was established in Africa, on the island São Tomé. The brotherhood's charter granted the possibility to request *alforria* (manumission) for any slave, male or female, who had become a member. Similar to what had occurred in Santiago, the slave class in São Tomé thus became stratified, with certain slaves being higher placed than others in a hierarchy that promised manumission at the top of

the scale. This system stimulated slave loyalty and their adoption of Portuguese cultural and religious elements.[13]

Portuguese missionary work in East Africa began in the early sixteenth century and was initially coordinated from the Jesuit stronghold in Goa, India. A separate diocese, detached from Goa, was established in 1610 on the island of Mozambique. There, the Dominican convent had a black brotherhood dedicated to Our Lady of the Rosary. From the island of Mozambique, several attempts were made by Jesuits and Dominicans to convert inland rulers. Despite some successes—most notably the conversion of the King of Mutapa in 1652—little more was achieved than the formation of small Catholic enclaves populated by Portuguese men, their African wives and mixed raced children. At least one of these Catholic enclaves in the interior, Sena, had a black brotherhood of the Rosary.[14]

The main focus of Portuguese missionary activities in Africa was West-Central Africa. Catholicism had been introduced in the Kingdom of Kongo in 1491, when Portuguese missionaries baptized the Manikongo Nzinga a Nkuwu as King João I of Kongo. Whereas Nzinga a Nkuwu had remained hesitant to fully embrace the new faith, Catholicism truly expanded in Kongo under the king's son Mvemba a Nzinga (c.1456-c.1542), better known under his Portuguese, Catholic name Afonso I. Catholicism in Kongo did not depend on European missionaries to thrive because an active local laity took their place. The few European missionaries in the kingdom worked alongside local interpreters, catechists and churchwardens and in practice very much depended on them. These lay ministers not only spread the new faith all over Kongo but were also employed in missionary activities in the kingdom of Ndongo, the Mbundu regions and Loango. Thanks to them, John Thornton claims, "Christianity conquered Kongo peacefully—but at the cost of adapting itself almost wholly to the 'conquered' people's conception of religion and cosmology."[15] Kongolese Catholicism was, in fact, a profoundly syncretic variant of Catholicism that stood closer to traditional indigenous beliefs than to the Church of Rome. Despite its syncretic character, the Kongolese Catholic Church was officially recognized by the Vatican and people in Kongo proudly identified themselves as Catholics.[16] A list of questions, submitted to the ambassador of the Kingdom of Kongo in Lisbon in 1595, reveals that by the late sixteenth century the Kongolese capital São Salvador already counted six lay brotherhoods: that of Our Lady of the Rosary, the Holy Sacrament, Saint Mary, the Immaculate Conception, the Holy Spirit, St. Ignatius, and St. Anthony.[17] According to Raphaêl Batsîkama, the St. Anthony brotherhood, in particular, had a profound impact on Kongolese religious culture.[18] Capuchin missionaries, who operated in Kongo from the mid-seventeenth until the late eighteenth century, established dozens of new brotherhoods—most notably that of St. Francis of Assisi and of Our Lady of the Rosary, but occasionally also that of the Cord of St. Francis, St. Bonaventure, and the sisterhood of the Slaves of Mary. The importance of brotherhoods to the Capuchin's missionary strategy is apparent in the case of the Flemish missionary Joris van Geel—one of the few non-Italian Capuchins operating in the Kongo—who carried with him several prewritten documents with the text "Rules of the brotherhood of…, founded at the Church of…" when he started his mission in 1651.[19]

Continuous conflicts with the kings of Kongo over control in West-Central Africa prompted the Portuguese to expand their stronghold in Luanda, which they had established in the southern edge of the kingdom in 1575. Luanda became a center of Portugal's missionary

ambitions in the region, spearheaded by the Jesuits. In and around Luanda but even as far into the interior as Massangano, a Luso-African culture developed, which naturally included brotherhoods.[20] It is in Luanda that the most spectacular example of Afro-Iberian procession culture has been recorded, the anonymous description of the celebrations following the canonization of the Jesuit Francis Xavier in 1620:

> First of all, a flag and a portrait of the saint were made.… The procession began at the main church of the city.… In front one could see three giants.… [T]he giants were followed by Creoles from São Tomé, who performed their dances…and amongst them was their king, before whom they gave speeches, according to their custom. Then the confraternities of the city followed and these are the following: the confraternity of St. Lucia, of the Holy Mary Magdalene, of the Holy Body (Corposant), of St. Joseph, of the Souls of Purgatory, of St. Anthony, of Our Lady of the Rosary, of Our Lady of the Conception, of the Most Holy Sacrament, all with their respective pennants.[21]

This report confirms that in seventeenth-century West-Central Africa a vivid Afro-Iberian procession culture existed in the context of black brotherhoods.

A similar pattern has been observed in Latin America. It is unknown whether the earliest brotherhoods in the Americas were created by the church authorities or on the initiative of slaves themselves. Writing about the island Hispaniola in the 1540s, Giralmo Benzoni noted that "the blacks make common cause among themselves" and "each nation recognizes its own king or governor," which indicates the latter.[22] In his description of early seventeenth-century Cartagena, the Jesuit Alonso de Sandoval also noted that slaves "depended on their brotherhoods to bury them." This was of vital importance, he noted, as nobody else cared for the piles of slave bodies left unburied, "thrown in the rubbish dump, where they will be eaten by dogs."[23]

One of the earliest extensive descriptions of a king election ceremony in the Americas, dating back to 1666, comes from Pernambuco, Brazil.[24] It was penned by the French traveler Urbain Souchu de Rennefort:

> Despite the difficult life they are living, the blacks sometimes have a chance to distract themselves. On Sunday, September 10, 1666 they had a feast in Pernambuco. After celebrating Mass, a group of about four hundred men and one hundred women elected a king and a queen, marched through the streets singing and reciting improvised verses, playing drums, trumpets and frame drums. They were wearing the clothes of their masters and mistresses, including golden chains and pearls.[25]

Later sources provide more detailed descriptions of such king election ceremonies. A famous example is that of Henry Koster, who during his stay in Brazil between 1809 and 1815 witnessed a brotherhood king election in Pernambuco:

> In March took place the yearly festival of our Lady of the Rosary, which was directed by negroes; and at this period is chosen the King of the Congo nation, if the person who holds this situation has died in the course of the year, has from

> any cause resigned or has been displaced by his subjects. The Congo negroes are permitted to elect a king and queen from among the individuals of their own nation, the personages who are fixed upon may either actually be slaves or they may be manumitted negroes. These sovereigns exercise a species of mock jurisdiction over their subjects which is much laughed at by the whites; but their chief power and superiority over their countrymen is shown on the day of the festival. The negroes of their nation, however, pay much respect to them. … We were standing at the door, when there appeared a number of male and female negroes, habited in cotton dresses of colours and of white, with flags flying and drums beating; and as they approached we discovered among them the king and queen, and the secretary of state. Each of the former wore upon their heads a crown, which was partly covered with gilt paper, and painted of various colours. … The expense of the church service was to be provided for by the negroes; and there stood in the body of the church a small table, at which sat the treasurer of this black fraternity and some other officers, and upon it stood a box to receive the money.[26]

Considering these parallels between African and Latin American brotherhoods, one is inclined to question whether black performance traditions in North America with characteristics similar to the ones presented in this section can also be traced back to Afro-Iberian brotherhoods.

King Celebrations in New England and New York

In his *Annals of Salem* (1845-49), Joseph Felt provided the following description of an African-American tradition that was known in Massachusetts as "Negro Election Day:" "When the long wished for day of anticipated pleasure came, they were seen attired in their best, with drums, banners, guns and swords. … Having elected their chief magistrate, they adopted regulations as the circumstances of their association required."[27]

Similar "elections" have been recorded from the mid-eighteenth until the mid-nineteenth century in Rhode Island, New Hampshire, and Connecticut. On those days, slaves elected a leader, whom they called "governor" or "king." This election procedure was accompanied with a lavish meal and dance performances, which included a parade during which salutes were fired. Kings were given a crown, sword and other emblems of royalty. One of them paraded through town "on one of his master's horses, adorned with plaited gear, his aides beside him *à la militaire*."[28]

The "elections" reveal that there was a hierarchy among the slaves, whereby those who served "a master of distinction" occupied leading positions in the slave organizations. Slave owners did not attempt to prevent such forms of self-government among the slaves.[29] Rather, as Wilkins Updike has shown, they rather rendered them support and took pride in clothing their slaves with some of their finest luxuries on Election Day:

> The slaves assumed the power and pride and took the relative rank of their masters, and it was degrading to the reputation of the owner if his slave appeared in inferior apparel, or with less money than the slave of another master

> of equal wealth. The horses of the wealthy landowners were on this day all surrendered to the use of slaves, and with cues, real or false, heads pomatumed and powdered, cocked hat, mounted on the best Narragansett pacers, sometimes with their master's sword, with their ladies on pillions, they pranced to election.[30]

The fact that slaveholders tolerated and even supported this tradition indicates that they perceived it as useful. In fact, after being elected "king" or "governor," the leader of the black community was expected to take charge of misdemeanors by slaves that arose during his term of office. Orville Platt mentions the existence of "a sort of police managed wholly by the slaves," and a black "court," whose punishments had more of an effect since "people of their own rank and color had condemned them, and not their masters."[31] As an example, William Piersen cites the case of a slave called Prince Jackson who was found guilty of stealing an axe whereupon he was given twenty lashes by King Nero's deputy sheriff.[32]

According to Sterling Stuckey, the "Election Day ceremony [served] much of the same function for blacks [in New England] that Pinkster served for New York blacks."[33] Just like Lynn had its King Pompey, South Kingstown its King Prince Robinson and Portsmouth its King Nero Brewster, New York's capital Albany had its King Charles.[34] An anonymous eyewitness described the annual "Pinkster" (Pentecost) procession in Albany featuring King Charles and other black dignitaries in the year 1803:

> All things being now in readiness, on Monday morning, the blacks and a certain class of whites, together with children of all countries and colours, begin to assemble on *Pinkster Hill* collected from every part of the city and from the adjacent country for many miles around, forming in the whole a motley group of thousands.… An old Guinea Negro, who is called *King Charles*, is master of ceremonies, whose authority is absolute, and whose will is law during the Pinkster holiday. On Monday morning between the hours of ten and twelve o'clock, his majesty after having passed through the principal streets in the city, is conducted in great style to *The Hill* already swarming with a multifarious crowd of gasping spectators. Before *him* is borne a standard, on which significant colours are displayed, and a painting containing his *Portrait*, and specifying what has been the duration of his reign. Two pedestrians, in appropriate badges, lead a superb steed, of a beautiful cream colour, on which their fictitious sovereign rides in all the pomp of an eastern *nabob*—whilst a large procession of the most distinguished and illustrious characters follow after. At length he reaches the encampment, and after the ceremonies in honor of his arrival are ended, he proceeds to collect his revenue.[35]

The fact that the Albany processions during Charles' reign started in State Street, located in one of Albany's most noble districts, indicates that the city's elite was at the very least willing to tolerate the tradition and most likely rendered some type of support to it, similar to what occurred during Election Day ceremonies in New England.

An example of such cooperation can be found in C.M. Woolsey's *History of the Town of Marlborough* (1908): "An old man with a large tract of land had among his slaves one called Harry. He was very large and a fine-looking fellow. He was the leader of a company or drilled

as such. His old master was very proud of him, and he always rode his owner's big black stallion on such occasions."[36] References to "black kings" have also been found at other places in New York. In 1738, for instance, the *New-York Weekly Journal* mentioned how "[s]everal people have been amus'd here with Relation of a Discovery of a Plot concerted by the negroes at Kingston, but by good Information, we find it to be no more than an intended Meeting, to drink to the Memory of an old Negro Fellow, dead some Time ago, whom they used to call their King."[37]

Scholars have traditionally assumed that "Election Day" and "Pinkster" were an imitation or parody of European traditions. Due to the similarities with Lord of Misrule festivals, these festivals tended to be perceived as a "safety valve allowing a cathartic release from the pent-up frustrations," as Shane White has suggested.[38] Considering the many parallels to brotherhoods, the spectacular celebrations could also be interpreted as the annual festive manifestation of a well-organized cooperative structure that implied black group solidarity as well as occasional negotiations with slaveholders. The fact that these organizations were capable of coordinating events that in the case of Albany attracted up to a thousand visitors also puts pressure on Berlin's argument that only "informal connections between black people" existed in North America.[39]

References to highly similar black king celebrations can be found in other parts of the Americas outside of the Iberian realm. In Martinique, for instance, the French governor made the following report of the 1758 Corpus Christi celebration:

> Several [slaves] were richly dressed to represent the King, Queen, all the royal family, even to grand officers of the crown. The Governor was even assured that in one of the parishes of the island, the priest had the year previously introduced two darkies who imitated the King and Queen into the sanctuary where they were both placed into the chairs.[40]

In 1843, James Phillippo wrote that in Jamaica "each of the African tribes upon the different estates formed itself into a distinct party, composed of men, women, and children. Each party had its King or Queen, who was distinguished by a mask of the most harlequin-like apparel. They paraded or gamboled in their respective neighborhoods, dancing to the rude music."[41] Henry Breen reported that in St. Lucia "each society has three kings and three queens, who are chosen by the suffrages of the members. The first, or senior, king and queen only make their appearance on solemn occasions, such as the anniversary of their coronation or the *fete* of the patron saint of the society."[42] Writing about the Virgin Islands, Thurlow Weed mentioned that "the slaves on each estate elect their Queen and Princess, with their King and Prince, whose authority is supreme."[43] In his *History of British Guiana* (1893), James Rodway argued that "it had been customary for years for the negroes of every nation in a district to choose head-men or 'Kings,' under whom were several subaltern officers of the same nation." The duties of these kings were "to take care of the sick and purchase rice, sugar, &c., for them, to conduct the burials, and that the customary rites and dances were duly observed."[44]

Similar king elections and subsequent parades with flags and music have been observed among slave communities all over the American diaspora, from New England all the way to Argentina. As Thornton confirms:

> The newly arrived African field hands often looked to organizations formed by their "nation"—a loose grouping of people from the same part of Africa or the same ethno-linguistic group—to provide leadership of nations … through the election of kings and queens. These elections were widespread in the society of Afro-American slaves in all parts of the Americas. In Iberian America the annual elections were public events, while in other areas they were acknowledged if not recognized.[45]

Scholars such as Margaret Creel, Michael Gomez and James Sweet have argued that such pan-American parallels in black performance traditions can be traced back to the establishment of slave associations in the American diaspora, which they believe to be modeled upon indigenous African religious and mutual-aid societies such as Ogboni, Kimpasi and Ekpe. However, the use of flags, crowns and banners in king parades along with the use of European aristocratic titles cannot be explained with reference solely to indigenous African traditions.[46]

One could therefore assume that such king election ceremonies in the American diaspora, including the ones performed on Election Day and Pinkster, may have their roots in Afro-Catholic brotherhoods brought to the Americas by the Charter Generations. Not by accident, Piersen's extensive research on New England's Election Days made him conclude that king elections in Brazilian black brotherhoods bear "striking similarity to the eighteenth-century Yankee pattern."[47]

Transatlantic Connections

In 1921, the Cuban anthropologist Ortiz already suggested that slave king elections in the New World related to a Hispano-Portuguese pattern.[48] The assumed transfer of an Iberian pattern to areas outside the Iberian realm in the Americas implies that many Africans must have adopted certain Iberian cultural and religious elements before they were shipped to the Americas as slaves. Such a claim can be convincingly made for a high percentage of Africans who constituted the Charter Generations in the New World. As Toby Green has shown, the overwhelming majority of slaves who were shipped to the New World until the mid-sixteenth century were West-Africans who had previously lived on the Iberian Peninsula, the Cape Verde Islands or São Tomé, all areas with a strong brotherhood tradition. From the late sixteenth until the mid-seventeenth century, West-Central Africa became the dominant source of American-bound slaves.[49] During this era labeled by Heywood and Thornton as "the Angolan wave," it is legitimate to assume that a high percentage of slaves had already familiarized itself with Afro-Portuguese cultural elements before being shipped to America.[50] Joseph Miller therefore assumes that Iberian or Afro-Iberian cultural elements formed a connection between both groups and argues that upon arrival in the New World, West-Central African slaves lived in intimate contact "with predecessors who had arrived in small numbers from backgrounds in slavery in late medieval Iberia" and that "particularly those coming through Kongo channels, must have had a useful familiarity with Portuguese Christianity and used it to find places for themselves without relying on the more 'African' aspects of their origins."[51]

The survival of (Afro-)Iberian elements in areas outside of the Iberian realm also implies that the Charter Generations' culture and traditions profoundly impacted slaves who arrived in later decades. The survival of these elements presupposes that the Charter Generations not only

established organizations modeled upon brotherhoods but also that these organizations were preserved by later generations and may even have been adopted, albeit in an adapted form, by slaves originating from parts of Africa—mostly West Africa—with little or no Portuguese cultural influence. As Sidney Mintz, Richard Price, and Gwendolyn Midlo Hall have confirmed, Charter Generations did, in fact, often manage to set a cultural pattern that was emulated by slaves who arrived in the Americas in later decades.[52]

All available data indicates that West-Central Africans are the most likely group to have set a strong pattern of Afro-Iberian elements in the Americas, also outside of the Iberian realm. Unless they previously lived in the Iberian Peninsula or on one of the Portuguese-controlled Atlantic islands, one can assume that relatively few slaves with roots in West Africa, the lower Guinea region and East Africa had adopted Iberian cultural elements before arriving in the Americas. This was different, however, with West-Central Africans. As Heywood confirms, "a significant percentage of the Central Africans who left the region as slaves had … been influenced by … Afro-Portuguese culture" and may have been responsible for "an early and continuing Central African cultural presence in the American diaspora."[53] Heywood and Thornton further argue that, upon arrival in the Americas, it was primarily West-Central African slaves who "possessed the means to set down their own cultural pattern in the Americas, even where they were subsequently outnumbered by new arrivals" and who provided "a crucial cultural model for the waves of captives, mostly from West Africa, brought in by the slave trade after 1640."[54]

The outstanding example of such an Afro-Iberian pattern set by West-Central African slaves comes from the Danish Virgin Islands, where the Moravian missionary worker Christian Oldendorp noted during his stay on the islands in the 1760s that it was common "primarily by the Negroes from the Congo" to perform "a kind of baptism … characterized by pouring water over the head of the baptized, placing some salt in his mouth, and praying over him in the Congo language." According to Oldendorp, this practice was of Portuguese origin and involved baptismal fathers and mothers who "adopt those whom they have baptized … and look after them as best they can. They are obliged to provide them with a coffin and burial clothing when they die."[55] The fact that Kongolese catechists catered to the needs of newcomers and ensured that they would receive a decent burial suggests that they operated in the context of a brotherhood-related organization.

If we apply this theory to the case of New York, it can be confirmed that the Charter Generation in the Dutch colony New Netherland and its capital New Amsterdam consisted almost exclusively of slaves of West-Central African origin. Their typically Lusitanian Catholic baptismal names such as Manuel, António, João, Isabel, Madalena, and Maria indicate that these slaves had gone—with various degrees of exposure—through a process of Iberian acculturation before they were shipped to America. Heywood and Thornton assume that these slaves "had adopted not only Christianity but elements of Portuguese language, law, foodways, clothing items, and names" before their arrival in New Amsterdam.[56] Culturally, religiously and linguistically, the Charter Generation in New Netherland formed, thus, a largely homogenous group with well established and mutually shared traditions of which some had Afro-Iberian roots. It has also been documented that these slaves managed to successfully defend their interests as a group. Documents make reference to a slave called Sebastião as the "captain of the

blacks," which confirms the existence of some type of organization.[57] According to Graham Hodges, all available data on the black community in New Amsterdam indicates that it formed an organization that "best resembled the confraternities or brotherhoods found among Kongolese and Angolan blacks living in Brazil."[58]

Although the Charter Generation is the most likely group to have introduced brotherhood traditions in New York, it should also be noted that among the slaves who were later brought to New York from Caribbean islands such as Jamaica or Barbados, some must have been familiar with Afro-Iberian traditions. Writing about Barbados in 1654, the French priest Antoine Biet mentioned, regarding the local slave population, that "if any of them have any tinge of the Catholic Religion which they received among the Portuguese, they keep it the best they can, doing their prayers and worshipping God in their hearts."[59] John Storm Roberts also pointed out that while black culture in Jamaica was traditionally believed to have been almost exclusively of West African origin, "strong Congolese elements were discovered … in Afro-Christian … sects."[60] Mullin has also provided examples of Jamaican newspaper descriptions of fugitive slaves in the 1790s referring to a "Negro woman with a crucifix necklace," another bearing a "cross shaped Spanish mark" and a third one as "speaking Portuguese."[61]

Mary Jorga, who in a report from New York dated 1741 is referred to as a "free Portuguese baptized negress," was probably such a Caribbean slave with West-Central African roots.[62] A reference in the *New York Gazette* of August 1733 to a runaway slave from Jacobus van Cortlandt called Andrew who "professeth himself to be a Roman Catholic" confirms the continuous existence of consciously Afro-Catholic slaves in New York well into the eighteenth century. Andrew's case is all the more interesting since he had shirts with him that were "marked with a cross on the left Breast." In the Kingdom of Kongo, shirts with an embroidered cross were a prerogative of nobles who had been granted knighthood in the Order of Christ.[63]

Conclusion

While the earliest historians working on slave culture in a North American context were mainly interested in an assumed process of assimilation according to European standards, later generations pointed out the need to look for indigenous African continuities and for the creation of syncretic cultures and innovations in the New World. The conclusions of this paper suggest the necessity to complement the latter with an increased focus on the amount of contact Africans had with European—primarily Portuguese—culture before they were shipped as slaves to the Americas.

Since the early sixteenth century, African rulers had become key players in the Atlantic trade. These transatlantic connections brought new ideas, cultural concepts and products as diverse as Chinese silk, Brazilian cassava, Indian textiles, Maldivian cowries, Mexican maize, Dutch gin and Portuguese church bells to Africa, where they had a strong impact on local cultures. In consequence of the transatlantic trade, the entire African west coastal area became an intercultural zone, marked by inter- and extra-African cultural mixtures to which not only Arab-Islamic but also Iberian-Catholic cultural elements contributed substantially. It is, as such, only natural that some enslaved Africans not only brought indigenous African traditions to the New World, but also syncretic traditions such as Afro-Iberian brotherhoods.

This new paradigm in the analysis of African-American performance traditions requires a change in attitude regarding the role of Christianity in African culture. Time and again, scholars narrowly reduced anti-colonial resistance to the attachment to pre-colonial traditions and failed to understand that, in many cases, the appropriation and reinvention of the idiom of the colonizer was a much more effective strategy in dealing with colonial aggression. That the strategic adoption of specific European elements by Africans did not imply submission to European standards can be illustrated by the occurrences surrounding the 1760 Battle of Kitombo. Convinced that they had been victorious in that battle thanks to a miraculous intervention of St. Luke, the rulers of the Kongolese region of Soyo decided to establish a new holiday dedicated to this Catholic saint. They did so after their army had administered a humiliating defeat to the Portuguese, members of the same nation that in 1491 had brought Christianity to Central Africa.

Notes

1 Van Baerle [1647] 2011, p. 236; Bastide [1960] 1971, vol. 1, pp. 21-35; Kent 1965, pp. 166-68.
2 Genovese 1979, p. 62; Tardieu 1984, p. 265; Thornton 1992, pp. 268-70; Landers 2002, pp. 227-42; Von Germeten 2008, p. xxvii; Landers 2013, pp. 153-62.
3 Souza 2005, p. 83. Unless otherwise indicated, all translations from languages other than English are mine.
4 Heywood 1999, p. 21.
5 Von Germeten 2013, p. 252.
6 Berlin 1996, p. 275-76.
7 Cañizares-Esguerra, Childs, and Sidbury 2013, p. 9.
8 Winston 1993, p. 634.
9 Lahon 2001-02, pp. 19-62; Saunders 1982, pp. 105-07; Tinhorão 1988, pp. 122-68; Borges 2005, pp. 89-98; Fiume 2007, p. 25.
10 Green 2012, p. 105.
11 Pereira 2005, pp. 337-41, 353.
12 Seibert 2012, p. 49.
13 Brásio 1952-88, vol. 1, pp. 472-74, 501; Seibert 2006, pp. 28-30.
14 Brásio 1973, pp. 547-62; Borges 2005, p. 50; Hastings 1994, pp. 120-23.
15 Thornton 1984, p. 154.
16 Ibid., pp. 147-67.
17 Cuvelier and Jadin 1954, p. 187.
18 Batsîkama 1999, pp. 5, 15.
19 Hildebrand 1940, p. 251. Also, see Brásio 1952-88, vol. 5, p. 612; vol. 15, pp. 482-97; Newitt 2010, p. 224; Jadin 1966, pp. 312-14.
20 Brásio 1952-88, vol. 3, p. 502; Heywood and Thornton 2007, p. 188.
21 Felner 1933, pp. 531-44.
22 Benzoni [1540] 1857, p. 94.
23 Von Germeten 2008, pp. xii-xiii, 71, 134.

24 Souza 2002, pp. 172-79; Kiddy 2005, pp. 22-31.
25 Souchu de Rennefort [1688] 1988, p. 225.
26 Koster 1816, pp. 243-44.
27 Felt 1845-49, vol. 22, pp. 419-20.
28 Caulkins 1866, pp. 330-31. See also Reidy 1978, pp. 102-17; Wade 1981, pp. 211-31; White 1994, pp. 13-50; Fowler 1866, p. 162.
29 Platt 1900, pp. 318-20.
30 Updike 1847, pp. 178.
31 Platt 1900, pp. 323-25.
32 Piersen 1988, pp. 134-35.
33 Stuckey 1994, p. 73.
34 White 1989, pp. 191-99.
35 Albany Centinel 1803.
36 Woolsey 1908, p. 234.
37 New-York Weekly Journal 1738.
38 White 1991, p. 99.
39 Berlin 1996, p. 276.
40 Peytraud 1897, pp. 182-83.
41 Phillippo 1843, p. 93.
42 Breen 1844, p. 192.
43 Weed 1866, p. 345.
44 Rodway 1893, pp. 295-97.
45 Thornton 1933, p. 200.
46 Creel 1988, pp. 45-54, 181-82; Gomez 1998, pp. 99-102; Sweet 2003, p. 207.
47 Piersen 1988, p. 124.
48 Ortiz 1921, pp. 5-39.
49 Green 2012, pp. 189, 194, 208, 457.
50 Heywood and Thornton 2007, p. ix.
51 Miller 2002, p. 61.
52 Mintz and Price 1976, pp. 25-26; Hall 2005, p. 169.
53 Heywood 2002, pp. 2, 12.
54 Heywood and Thornton 2007, p. 238.
55 Oldendorp [1770] 1987, p. 263.
56 Heywood and Thornton 2009, p. 194.
57 Van Laer 1974, 4:96; see also Heywood and Thornton 2009, pp. 194-99; Van Zandt 2008, pp. 137; Gehring 1980, p. 55; Christoph 1991, p. 159; Frijhoff 1995, p. 769; Heywood and Thornton 2007, p. 264; Other experts on African-American performance culture have also suggested or at least entertained the possibility that slave organizations modeled upon Afro-Iberian brotherhoods may have existed in North America. See Kinser 1990, pp. 43-45; Sublette 2008, pp. 114-15.
58 Hodges 1999, p. 28.

59 Handler 1967, pp. 61, 67, 71.
60 Roberts 1998, p. 34.
61 Mullin 1992, p. 239.
62 Hodges 1999, p. 124.
63 New-York Gazette 1733. According to the Capuchin missionary Raimondo da Dicomano, knights of the Order of Christ in the Kingdom of Kongo enjoyed "the privilege to put lots of crosses made with pieces of cloth in several colors on their capes or on the cloths made out of straw which they use to cover themselves" ("il privilegio di potere mettere molte croci fatte di ritagli di panno di diversi colori nel ferraiolo ò in quel panno di paglia con che ordinariamente si coprono"). Arlindo [1798] 2008. See also Fromont 2008, p. 89; Heywood and Thornton 2007, pp. 135-43.

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