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WHY RARA BURNS JUDAS DURING LENT: *Rethinking the Origins of Catholic Elements in Haitian Culture from an Afro-Iberian Perspective*

ABSTRACT: Until the 1980s, Catholic elements in Haitian culture tended to be interpreted exclusively in connection to the forced conversion of the enslaved population under French rule. This changed following John Thornton's groundbreaking research into the development of Christianity in early modern Africa—Kongo in particular—and the awareness that a significant number of enslaved Africans already identified as Christian before their arrival in Saint-Domingue. This article's goal is to go beyond Thornton's research by showing that we can acquire a better understanding of Catholic elements in Haitian culture if we start our analysis in late medieval Iberia. To illustrate this, the article focuses on one of Haiti's most enigmatic cultural traditions, known as *Chariopié*, *Lwalwadi*, or, most commonly, *Rara*. Although this performance has received abundant scholarly interest, questions relating to the origin of its Catholic elements have remained largely unanswered. This is regrettable considering that Rara parades follow the liturgical calendar of Lent and intensify in frequency during Holy Week. Moreover, a key element of Rara consists of the destruction of an effigy of Judas Iscariot, in accordance with the Biblical account of the Easter story. Using a comparative analysis, this article presents a number of remarkable parallels between Rara and late medieval Iberian Lent traditions. To explain these parallels, it claims that enslaved Africans who were familiar with Iberian practices prior to their arrival in the Caribbean established, by their own initiative, a network of mutual aid and burial societies modeled on Afro-Iberian Catholic brotherhoods.

KEYWORDS: Haiti, Rara, Catholicism, Vodou, Voodoo, Portugal, Iberia

Since the publication of John Thornton's "On the Trail of Voodoo" in *The Americas* in 1988, the analysis of Haitian culture has changed considerably.[1] Inspired by Thornton's groundbreaking research on the development of Christianity in early modern Africa—Kongo in particular—a new generation of scholars broke with a tradition of dismissing Catholic features in Vodou as unimportant residue from an era when enslaved Africans

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1. John Thornton, "On the Trail of Voodoo: African Christianity in Africa and the Americas," *The Americas* 44:3 (January 1988): 261–278.

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strategically faked Christian devotion as a ruse to gain favors or a smokescreen behind which they practiced their "truly African" rituals. Hein Vanhee, for instance, insisted that many "elements drawn from Catholicism" in Haitian Vodou were "essentially a continuation of eighteenth-century Kongo religion."[2] Donald Cosentino distanced himself from the tendency to perceive St. James the Greater, worshipped as *Sen Jak,* as a mere representation of the Yoruba divinity Ogun, with the argument that the "feast of St. James in the Kingdom of Kongo" must have functioned as a "model for what Africans would reinvent in Haiti."[3] Similarly, Terry Rey traced the annual pilgrimage to La-Plaine-du-Nord during the feast of St. James to "Kongolese devotion to this saint" and provocatively accused earlier generations of scholars of having "unwittingly de-Catholiciz[ed] seventeenth- and eighteenth-century Kongolese religious culture in the New World."[4]

As this brief overview reveals, scholars who have used a comparative methodology in their study of Catholic elements in Haitian culture have displayed a tendency to focus on connections with Kongo. This focus is understandable considering the arrival, especially toward the end of the eighteenth century, of large numbers of enslaved Africans from the Kongo region.[5] However, the development of Christianity in Kongo cannot be properly understood if the study is started in Central Africa; rather, it should be seen as the continuation of a process that began in late medieval Iberia and further evolved on the islands of Cape Verde and São Tomé before reaching continental Africa.

This article's goal is to demonstrate that we obtain a better understanding of Catholic elements in Haitian popular culture by relating them to cultural traditions from late medieval Iberia and the African Atlantic islands. To illustrate this, I will focus on one of Haiti's most enigmatic cultural traditions, known as *Chariopié*, *Lwalwadi*, or, most commonly, *Rara*. Although this performance has drawn abundant scholarly interest, questions relating to the origin of its Catholic elements have remained largely unanswered. This is regrettable, considering that Rara parades follow the liturgical calendar of Lent—from Ash Wednesday until Easter Sunday—and intensify in frequency

2. Hein Vanhee, "Central African Popular Christianity and the Making of Haitian Vodou Religion," in *Central Africans and Cultural Transformations in the American Diaspora*, Linda M. Heywood, ed. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), 262.

3. Donald J. Cosentino, "It's all for You, Sen Jak!," in *Sacred Arts of Haitian Vodou*, Donald J. Cosentino, ed. (Los Angeles: UCLA, Fowler Museum of Cultural History, 1995), 250.

4. Terry Rey, "Kongo Catholic Influences on Haitian Popular Catholicism: A Sociohistorical Exploration," in *Central Africans and Cultural Transformations,* 267, 273.

5. David Geggus, "The French Slave Trade: An Overview," *William and Mary Quarterly* 58:1 (2001): 119–138. Recent data from the Slave Voyages Database at https://www.slavevoyages.org/ confirm a sharp increase in enslaved people imported from Central (as opposed to West) Africa in the decades prior to the Haitian Revolution.

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and duration during Holy Week. Moreover, a key element of Rara consists of the carrying and burning or destruction of an effigy of Judas Iscariot, in accordance with the Biblical account of the Easter story.

While there can be no doubt that elements rooted in Vodou and indigenous African traditions (Fon, Ewe, Yoruba, and others) have been part of the stream of influences that shaped Rara, I will focus here on its Catholic characteristics. I will do so by first presenting an overview of the historical sources on Rara and the main interpretations of the tradition. I will then identify parallels with late medieval Iberian Lenten traditions as well as evidence of the dissemination of these practices on the African Atlantic islands, continental Africa, and, subsequently, the Americas. This will allow me not only to present a new interpretation of Catholic elements in Rara, but also to shed new light on other characteristics of this tradition, including the presence of kings and queens, the quasi-military organization of its bands, the carrying of banners, the licentious character of its songs, and the participants' concerns with evil spirits. I will conclude with a reflection on what the findings presented in this article mean for our understanding of Black cultural identity formation in the Americas and how they challenge the traditional thinking about syncretism and the transmission of cultural practices in the Atlantic world.

RARA

In *En Haiti* (1910), the French diplomat Léon-Eugène-Aubin Coullard-Descos, using the pen name Eugène Aubin, provided the earliest known description of a Rara performance. In his observations of social life in early twentieth-century Haiti, Aubin noted that locals used to "elect a king of the *loiloidi*," who "during the end of Holy Week" participated "in a masquerade with people marching through the land." He considered this custom to be a reenactment of a campaign by "soldiers of Christ, who depart in search of Jews." Aubin explained that "each dwelling formed its own group, dressed in Carnival tinsels" and that on Maundy Thursday "the king departs, in the company of his court, with flags and drums. Day and night, the walks and dances continue uninterruptedly, until, on Easter morning, they return to their dwellings." He also pointed out that there were punishments for those responsible for pregnancies that had occurred in the context of Rara festivities.[6]

Aubin's enigmatic reference to a search for Jews corresponds to a passage in William Seabrook's *Magic Island* (1929) about "life-sized effigies of Judas

6. Eugène Aubin, *En Haïti: Planteurs d'autrefois, Nègres d'aujourd'hui* (Paris: A. Colin, 1910), 42–43.

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and Pontius Pilate's soldiers" that on the day before Easter Sunday were sought and torn to pieces by "all the neighbors, armed and shouting . . . '*Qui bo'li?*' (Where is the traitor hiding?)." Seabrook associated this custom with bands "shouting, beating drums, marching in the streets, racing up side-alleys; meeting other groups, each intent on finding the Judas."[7]

Seabrook's sensationalist book, famous for introducing *zombies* to popular culture, piqued the curiosity of the anthropologist Harold Courlander. In *Haiti Singing* (1939) and *The Drum and the Hoe* (1960), Courlander studied Rara as part of Haiti's "riotous carnival spirit," with songs that are "boldly ribald or licentious." After Shrovetide, he explained, "hundreds of Rara bands move through the towns and villages, each with its orchestra of bamboo trumpets or conch-shell horns and its 'king'" and "every weekend for seven weeks, in the heat of day and the darkness of night, the mountain trails are alive with these processions." Courlander specified that it is the "*mait' Rara*," who "assumes the organizational responsibilities for the group." He is the one who selects a "king" based on the quality of his dancing style, "a belly dance, a dance of delicate balance, or one of complicated footwork and semiacrobatics." Other important Rara personalities are "the *major jonc*, who juggles with a metal baton, and the *jongleur*, a juggler." On the last day, "usually late in the night, prayers are said, the *loa* [Vodou spirits] are called upon, and some of the festive paraphernalia is thrown into a fire."

In spite of the lack of archival sources, Courlander believed that Rara was "very old," dating back to an era "before Soulouque" [1849]. While he admitted that "there seems to be no records of Rara in West Africa," Courlander speculated that "the word itself may come from the Yoruba adverb *rara*, meaning loudly." He also believed "the general tone of Rara [to be] nonreligious," yet recognized that the tradition had connections to Vodou, since "virtually all Rara drums and other paraphernalia are 'dedicated' or 'rededicated' before Lent in special *hounfor* [Vodou temple] services." Courlander also identified Catholic influences, most notably on "Good Friday," which "is given over in good measure to miming the story of Jesus and Judas." While certain bands "may carry an effigy of Judas hanging from a pole," others "will burn the Judas effigy," drag it "in the dust as the crowd moves along the road," or have "a man playing the part of Judas," crawling "on his hands and knees along the trail, while Jesus' avengers pursue him with long, cracking whips." Ultimately, however, Courlander believed that these "half-clear ideas of Christian crusades"

7. W. B. Seabrook, *The Magic Island* (New York: Harcourt, Brace and Company, 1929), 271–272.

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and "plans to assassinate one Judas" had little religious significance: "It is simply Rara, loud noise, and everyone is having fun."[8]

In *Dances of Haiti* (1938), the African-American choreographer and anthropologist Katherine Dunham placed a stronger emphasis on the tradition's Catholic dimension. She pointed out that among her older informants "the consensus of opinion was that though the Rara bands have become almost completely incorporated into Mardi Gras, they were, and still are in the more remote regions, a native celebration of the ascension of Christ" and claimed that "Rara undoubtedly has an earlier, more religious connotation . . . not in the festive mood of Mardi Gras but seriously celebrating the arising Christ."[9]

In later studies, several other scholars also distanced themselves from Courlander's interpretation of Rara as a predominantly secular performance, but did so by emphasizing its connections to Vodou. Dolores Yonker, for instance, associated the tradition in *Caribbean Festival Arts* (1988) with the Haitian Revolt of 1791 and believed that "the African traditions so courageously defended are commemorated in Rara." She insisted that "Rara is not for pleasure but for exhaustion, it is a duty commanded by the loa" and highlighted the importance of Vodou rituals, most notably the invocation of "Legba . . . guardian of crossroads . . . who must be placated in order to assure a safe passage." She also explained connections to Vodou at the tradition of "*brûler Carnival* [sic]" when "Rara bands set fire to objects used in Carnival . . . performing ritual acts . . . commonly used in *vodoun* ceremonies," yet admitted that the habit of "plung[ing] a finger into the ashes and draw[ing] a cross on [one's] forehead" contained "an echo of the Catholic custom of Ash Wednesday."[10]

In a similar vein, Elizabeth McAlister stressed in *Rara!* (2002) the attention participants give to the "spirits of the Afro-Haitian religion." Rara bands, she claimed, "fulfill mystical contracts, salute sacred places and pay tribute to the recently dead." This occurs "under the patronage of the Vodou spirits" and can lead to their ire if "people did not fulfill their Rara contract." Although she mentioned in a side note that "many of the Kongo were already converted Christians when they were enslaved," McAlister related Rara's Christian elements primarily to forced "conversion practices of the French Catholic

8. Harold Courlander, *Haiti Singing* (New York: Cooper Square Publishers, [1939] 1973), 168–169; Harold Courlander, *The Drum and the Hoe: Life and Lore of the Haitian People* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1960), 105–109.

9. Katherine Dunham, *Dances of Haiti* (Los Angeles: UCLA, Center for Afro-American Studies, [1938] 1983), 10, 33.

10. Dolores Yonker, "Rara in Haiti," in *Caribbean Festival Arts: Each and Every Bit of Difference*, John W. Nunley and Judith Bettelheim, eds. (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1988), 147–151.

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Church." She also argued that the connection to Lent existed because "Holy Week was mandated (in 1685, under the Code Noir) to provide a respite from labor for enslaved Africans," and that whenever "Rara members take on the identity of *djyab* (devils) or 'Jews'," they would do so "to oppose the classes of Catholic, French-speaking elites who would give them these labels." Even more, "Haitians embraced the subversive identity of 'the Jew' and see Jews somehow as forerunners of their African ancestors."[11]

While I can agree with McAlister's characterization of Rara as a mystical contract with the spirit world and a form of tribute to the recently dead, I object to her interpretation of the tradition's Catholic elements—in particular the characterization of Rara as "anti-Christian."[12] I am also skeptical about McAlister's interpretation of the Judas ritual. One wonders, for instance, why the same Haitians who allegedly admire Jews as forerunners of their ancestors would violently destroy an effigy of "the Jew" during Rara performances.

The historical development and meaning of Rara can, in fact, easily be misinterpreted if studied solely in connection with French rule. Although it may seem natural to assume that the tradition to destroy an effigy of Judas during Lent reached Haiti's Black population via French channels, the following section will show that there are good reasons to relate this custom to Iberian cultural influences.

JEWS

Considering that the first known description of a Rara parade dates back to the early twentieth century, which coincides with the rise of anti-Semitism in Europe and subsequently the wider Atlantic, one could be tempted to view the Judas ritual as a Haitian variant of anti-Semitic scapegoating in an era of transnational migration and cultural transmission. Signs of anti-Semitic aggression in connection to the Crucifixion narrative go back earlier in time, however. In his *Description topographique* (1796), Médéric Moreau de Saint-Méry mentioned the case of an "old, fanatic Black woman" throwing stones at the house of a Jew in the conviction that his people "had crucified" Christ. This scene occurred at a time of year when, according to Moreau, churches in Saint-Domingue were "packed" with African-descendant people gathering "for prayers and the singing of hymns." Moreau, a native of the

11. Elizabeth McAlister, *Rara! Vodou, Power, and Performance in Haiti and Its Diaspora* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2002), 3–4, 7, 10, 15, 36, 87, 127.

12. McAlister, *Rara!*, 129.

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French colony, also noted that during Holy Week he frequently saw "a crowd of Black people in the streets raising hues against certain people" and treating them "like dogs" for having failed to observe sexual abstinence, which recalls Aubin's reference to punishments for pregnancies. Moreau classified these acts of public shaming during Holy Week as "a bizarre belief" of "the Black population" and admitted that all his attempts to "learn about its origin had been in vain."[13]

While Moreau did not mention the destruction of effigies of Judas, a reference to this practice was made by Victor Schoelcher in 1840. When visiting Cap-Haïtien during the Easter holidays, the French abolitionist noted that in "several neighborhoods of the city dummies were tied to a pole and shot at with guns." When, on Holy Saturday, "at ten o'clock, the moment of the resurrection, one could hear the discharge of artillery and muskets," some "savages aimed their fire at the dummies, who represented nothing less than the Jews." This was followed, one hour later, by a "great representation at church," involving the dramatic unveiling of the statue of Christ, and was anticipated on Good Friday by a night procession with statues representing the Passion of Christ that involved the participation of "4 to 500 women." Like Moreau, Schoelcher was unfamiliar with the popular Holy Week celebrations he witnessed in Haiti and "believed he had been assisting at idolatrous processions absolutely comparable to those of the monks in Mexico."[14] Schoelcher's reference to Hispanic traditions finds a parallel in Aubin's reflections on the origin of Rara. Instead of relating the practice to French cultural and religious influences on Haiti's Black population, Aubin traced the ritual to Iberian culture with the observation that the burning of effigies of Judas "seems now to be almost extinct in Cuba, but is said to still exist in Puerto Rico . . . and in the Dominican Republic." The Haitian "loiloidi," he believed, "is probably derived from this custom."[15]

The scapegoating of Jews during Holy Week performances has, indeed, a long tradition in Iberian societies. As Barbara Mauldin has argued, "Holy Week was of particular importance in the Catholic ritual cycle," which expressed itself "in processions and dramas [where] the evil characters were the Jews, ahistorically portrayed as slayers of Christ."[16] One such tradition is the *Que(i)ma de Judas*, which involves the parading of effigies of Judas that on Holy Saturday, typically at 10 a.m., the time of the "Alleluia," are publicly destroyed and

13. Médéric-Louis-Elie Moreau de Saint-Méry, *La description topographique, physique, civile, politique et historique de la partie française de Saint-Domingue*, Marcel Dorigny, ed., 3 vols. (Saint-Denis [France]: Société française d'histoire d'outre-mer, [1796] 2004), 1:62, 338, 3:1177.

14. Victor Schoelcher, *Colonies étrangères et Haiti,* 2 vols. (Paris: Pagnerre, 1843), 2:291–292.

15. Aubin, *En Haïti*, 276.

16. Barbara Mauldin, *Masks of Mexico: Tigers, Devils, and the Dance of Life* (Santa Fe: Museum of New Mexico Press, 1999), 3.

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burned.[17] The public shaming of "sinners," with scenes similar to those described by Moreau, was also common in Iberian societies. In response to the traditional submission of petitions for grace (*indulgencias/endoenças*) on Good Friday, groups of men would stage torch parades on the Eve of Maundy Thursday masked as penitents or, as in the Portuguese city of Braga, as Roman soldiers, who, as Rodney Gallop phrased it, "exercised the traditional privilege of shouting aloud the secret sins of the inhabitants. No calumny was too vile or scurrilous, no charge too false or too true, to be proclaimed in this manner to all and sundry."[18]

Similar to what we noted in the case of Moreau, Schoelcher, and Aubin, the surprised reactions of French visitors to eighteenth-century Iberia reveal a lack of familiarity with these Holy Week traditions. Pierre Dezoteux de Cormatin, using the pseudonym Duc du Châtelet, was shocked by the Holy Week performances he witnessed in eighteenth-century Lisbon and classified them as a "veritable carnival."[19] In the 1820s, Marianne Baillie even considered these celebrations "an impious and absurd joke," in particular the fact that "in the public street they hang Judas and have processions with a man representing Abraham."[20] Other Europeans were just as clueless. When the German ethnographer Otto Schütt learned in nineteenth-century Luanda, Angola, that the Portuguese with whom he was having dinner planned to place a Jew "on a pole on Easter and subsequently burn him," he had to be reassured that they were not planning to execute a real Jewish person.[21]

The French painter Jean-Baptiste Debret described the same custom in early nineteenth-century Brazil, where he associated the "ritual hanging of a Judas made out of straw" with "people of the most destitute class" and depicted an exclusively Black audience in his accompanying drawing.[22] Mary Karasch's research on colonial Rio de Janeiro confirms that the enslaved "participated with fervor" at the "burning of Judas" and that "travelers were at a loss to

17. Teófilo Braga, *O povo português nos seus costumes, crenças e tradições*, 2 vols. (Lisbon: Publicações Dom Quixote, [1885] 1985-86), 2:196; Luís Chaves, *Portugal além* (Vila Nova de Gaia: Ediçoes Pátria, 1932), 54; Miguel Barnet, *The Autobiography of a Runaway Slave, Esteban Montejo*, Jocasta Innes, trans. (New York: Vintage Books, [1966] 1973), 79; Rossini Tavares de Lima, *Folclore das festas cíclicas* (São Paulo: Irmãos Vitale, 1971), 37; Fradique Lizardo and J. P. Muñoz Victoria, *Fiestas patronales y juegos populares dominicanos* (Santo Domingo: Fundación García-Arévalo, 1979), 95–96; Carlos Rodrigues Brandão, *Sacerdotes de viola: Rituais religiosos do catolicismo popular em São Paulo e Minas Gerais* (Petrópolis: Vozes, 1981), 195; Ernesto Veiga de Oliveira, *Festividades cíclicas em Portugal* (Lisbon: Dom Quixote, 1984), 75–76; Angelina Pollak-Eltz, *La religiosidad popular en Venezuela* (Caracas: San Pablo, 1994), 105; Max Harris, "Diabolic Suffering, Whips and the Burning of Judas: Holy Week in Cabral, Dominican Republic," in *Festive Devils of the Americas*, Milla Cozart Riggio, Angela Marino, and Paolo Vignolo, eds. (London: Seagull Books, 2015), 133.

18. Rodney Gallop, *Portugal: A Book of Folk-Ways* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1936), 107.

19. [Pierre Dezoteux de Cormatin], *Voyage du ci-devant duc du Chatelet, en Portugal*, 2 vols. (Paris: Chez F. Buisson, [1798]), 85.

20. Quoted in Braga, *O povo português*, 2:196.

21. Otto H. Schütt, *Reisen im südwestlichen Becken des Congo* (Berlin: Dietrich Reimer, 1881), 17.

22. Jean Baptiste Debret, *Viagem pitoresca e histórica ao Brasil*, Sérgio Milliet, trans., 2 vols. (São Paulo: Martins, [1834] 1954), 2:196.

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explain why the city's slaves eagerly awaited the moment when they could pounce on the image of the corpse of Judas, throw it to the ground, pummel it, and tear it to pieces."[23] These reactions consistently reveal a lack of familiarity with what was taking place, which makes it unlikely that the popular Holy Week customs observed by Schoelcher, Moreau, and Aubin reached the island's Black population via French channels.

Aubin's theory that such customs were the result of Iberian influences can be strengthened with reference to the formerly Dutch colony of Curaçao. In 1682—three years before the introduction of the Code Noir in Saint-Domingue—the (Protestant) Dutch governor of this Caribbean island intervened during Holy Week at the request of the island's Jewish population to prevent "evil-intended people . . . in particular those of the Spanish nation" from "exhibiting a hanged Judas, as they do according to their custom, with features resembling a member of the Jewish nation."[24] What happened is that sailors aboard a Spanish ship in the Curaçao harbor had hoisted an effigy of Judas, whom they had dressed like the island's rabbi. It was their intention to make its head explode and then drag the dummy to the nearby synagogue.[25]

In spite of the governor's intervention and the fine imposed on the Spaniards, the custom prevailed among the island's Black population (that, unlike the Dutch Calvinist and Sephardic Jewish elite, was Catholic) and preserved well into the twentieth century an anti-Semitic character. Paul Brenneker's research reveals that as late as the 1960s Afro-Curaçaoans typically concluded Holy Week with a tradition known as *bati Húda* (beating the Jew), which consisted of making "effigies of Judas" that were "placed in front of the house" and then "carried around" by groups "blowing the *cachu*," "scraping the *wiri*," and singing "Judas songs," such as "*Boli bocalica boli mba*." The ritual ended with people "attacking the effigy and tearing it apart," which "frequently required a police intervention, because, out of misplaced religious zeal, the effigy often ended up in the yard of a Jewish family."[26]

23. Mary C. Karasch, *Slave Life in Rio de Janeiro, 1808–1850* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1987), 275–278.

24. "Verbod" (March 24, 1682), in *West-Indisch Plakaatboek. Publikaties en andere wetten alsmede de oudste resoluties betrekking hebbende op Curaçao, Aruba, Bonaire*, J. A. Schiltkamp and J. Th. de Smidt, eds., 2 vols. (Amsterdam: S. Emmering, 1978), 1:97.

25. Vergadering van de Raad van Curaçao (March 28, 1682), Memorandum van Jan Ignacius Echeverria (April 14, 1682), and "Gouverneur Nicolaas van Liebergen aan de WIC" (April 25, 1682), in National Archives of the Netherlands, The Hague (ARA), New West-India Company (NWIC) 617, fols. 149-152, 178, 193-194. Quoted in Wim Klooster, *Illicit Riches: Dutch Trade in the Caribbean, 1648–1795* (Leiden: KITLV, 1998), 65–66.

26. Paul Brenneker, *Zjozjoli: Gegevens over de volkskunde van Curaçao, Aruba en Bonaire* (Curaçao: Publisidat Antiano, 1986), 50, 247; Paul Brenneker, *Sambumbu*, 10 vols. (Curaçao: Drukkerij Scherpenheuvel, 1969-75), 1:186, 6:1507, 7:2276–2277.

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The parallels to Haiti are abundantly clear—even the song corresponds to Seabrook's "*bo'li.*" They confirm that we can acquire a better understanding of Christian elements in Rara by switching our focus from French to Iberian influences on Haiti's Black population. This is all the more the case considering that we find parallels not only to the burning of Judas and the public shaming of "sinners" in late medieval Iberian rituals but, as the next section will illustrate, also to the spiritual dimension of Rara.

ENTRUSTING OF THE SOULS

In late medieval Iberian society, street performances during Holy Week were typically organized by lay confraternities or brotherhoods. The performances should be understood in connection with ex-votos, in the Catholic tradition of expressing gratitude for the fulfillment of a vow–a promise made to a saint in order to obtain a grace. There was a firm belief that not honoring one's vows or doing so only halfheartedly could have disastrous consequences, not just for oneself but also for one's relatives, friends, or community. Saints were attributed human characteristics and were believed to be moody and vengeful. They were not simply prayed to: they expected the faithful to take into consideration their individual (dis)likes. St. Bartholomew, for instance, was believed to like black chickens, whereas St. Benedict could be pleased with white chickens. In extreme cases, people promised their own death by offering the saint a *mortaja/mortalha* (burial shroud). By the same token, people who felt that a saint had let them down in spite of adequate dedication did not hesitate to express their anger by shouting insults at or even "punishing" his or her statue.[27]

While it would go too far to speak of a cult of the dead, brotherhoods also dedicated exceptional attention to the souls of the deceased. The regular payment of dues represented a form of "death insurance" in the sense that it guaranteed a procession, burial space, and a coffin, as well as spiritual attention after one's passing. The force of these guarantees should be understood in connection to the doctrine of purgatory as an intermediary place between hell and heaven for those who died in God's grace but were insufficiently purified to achieve eternal salvation. By assuming these tasks, brotherhoods functioned as intermediaries between the living and the dead.[28]

27. William A. Christian Jr., *Local Religion in Sixteenth-Century Spain* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1981), 23–69; Helen Rawlings, *Church, Religion and Society in Early Modern Spain* (New York: Palgrave, 2002), 207–208; Pedro Penteado, *Peregrinos da memória: O santuário de Nossa Senhora de Nazaré, 1600–1785* (Lisbon: Centro de Estudos da História Religiosa, 1998), 170–173; Pierre Sanchis, *Arraial, festa de um povo: As romarias portuguesas*, Madalena Mendes de Matos, trans. (Lisbon: Dom Quixote, 1983), 49–50, 86–93, 158.

28. A. H. de Oliveira Marques, *Daily Life in Portugal in the Late Middle Ages*, S. S. Wyatt, trans. (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1971), 225–226; Maria Ângela Beirante, *Territórios do sagrado: Crenças e*

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Besides the annual commemoration of the dead on All Saints' Day and All Souls' Day, brotherhoods typically gathered after the first week, first month, and first year of a member's death. They also completed vows that had remained unfulfilled after a member's sudden death. For so long as the vows remained unfulfilled, it was believed, the deceased's soul remained "in pain" and kept haunting the living. The alleged presence of spirits of the dead in the world of the living is a topic that shows up in many Iberian legends, most notably those of the Santas Compañas/Companhas (Holy Companies), processions of tormented souls, wandering around at night.[29]

These legends recall authentic brotherhood rituals, one of which was known in Portugal and northwestern Spain as the *encomendação das almas*. Although it has also been observed on All Souls' Day, this "entrusting of the souls" typically took place during Lent. It is believed to have pre-Tridentine roots, dating back to at least the year 1515. However, since the custom occurred at night and at the margin of official Lenten celebrations, extensive descriptions show up only in the nineteenth century. They reveal that starting on the Eve of Ash Wednesday, penitents organized nightly processions that increased in intensity during the Week of Sorrows, as exemplified by the cult of the Seven Sorrows and the daggers piercing the Virgin's heart, and culminated during Holy Week. People wandered for several miles while singing *loas* (veneration songs) to the saints in call-and-response form, hence the popular phrase *botar loas* (launching veneration songs). Along the way, participants made occasional stops to ask for donations and call for prayers for the souls in purgatory, typically starting with the phrase "*Alerta, alerta, a vida é curta e a morte é certa*" (Hearken, hearken, life is short and death is certain). The lugubrious aspect of these processions was reinforced by the chant of *"Dies Irae"* in plainchant, the wearing of *balandraus* (long-sleeved cloaks with a hood), the carrying of crosses, the shaking of rattles, the ringing of bells, and the clanking of chains fastened around the ankles. Penitents also made frequent use of a funnel-shaped object in order to amplify their calls and increase their emotional effect. To strengthen the repentant character of the tradition, some wore a crown woven from thorns or carried a whip they used for self-flagellation. According to popular belief, these nightly processions attracted tormented souls, most notably at crossroads and cemeteries, which made them a dangerous endeavor. For this reason, passing a crossroad was associated with a complex set of rituals to ensure

comportamentos na Idade Média em Portugal (Lisbon: Colibri, 2011), 32–76, 182; Hermínia Vasconcelos Vilar, *A vivência da morte no Portugal medieval: A Estremadura portuguesa* (Redondo: Patrimónia, 1995), 180–191.

29. Marques, *Daily Life*, 274–279; Vilar, *A vivência da morte*, 215; Gallop, *Portugal*, 63, 98; João de Pina-Cabral, *Sons of Adam, Daughters of Eve: The Peasant Worldview of the Alto Minho* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1986), 222–229; Jesús Rodríguez López, *Supersticiones de Galicia y preocupaciones vulgares* (Madrid: R. Rojas, 1910), 167–178; Aurelio de Llano Roza de Ampudia, *Del folklore asturiano: mitos, supersticiones, costumbres* (Madrid: Talleres de Voluntad, 1922), 66–75.

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protection. The most common one consisted of drawing on the ground a signet ring around a Christian cross or a Seal of Solomon, with the leader kneeling in the middle of his respondents, who crossed themselves with the left hand in order to scare off evil spirits.[30]

We find ample documentation of this tradition in Latin America, most notably in Brazil. In 1817, for instance, the French botanist Auguste de Saint-Hilaire observed in a town near Ouro Preto that, during Lent, "three times a week, I heard passing through the streets processions called '*procissão das almas*'" that were "not accompanied by any priest" and strove "to obtain deliverance from heaven for the souls in purgatory."[31] Alexandre de Mello Moraes Filho's *Festas e tradições populares* (1895) provides a more detailed description of these "nightly processions," with "male penitents," some of whom "dressed in female garb, with skirts . . . carrying a whip for self-flagellation" and others "playing flutes [and] fiddles" for "over an hour, pausing here and there to call for prayers for the souls in purgatory."[32] Rossini de Lima confirms that, "during Lent" one could witness all over Brazil "nightly processions" with people "singing and asking for prayers for the souls of those who roam around" because they "believed that the souls of those who did not die a natural death tortured the living."[33] Additional research by Oswaldo Xidieh revealed that people typically participated in this tradition after "having been approached by a tormented soul during their sleep, with a request for a prayer." These processions, he explained, were led "by a *mestre* [master]" and a "number of officers," including "a *caceiteiro*, who carried a stick."[34] In the twenty-first century, Anna Carvalho studied such groups of penitents in the Brazilian Northeast, who, dressed in the traditional *opas* (sleeveless capes) of confraternities, stage nightly processions during Lent under the direction of a *decurião* (Lat. *decurion*, cavalry officer). The processions stop at certain houses, where the penitents ask for donations and for prayers for the souls in purgatory.[35]

30. Braga, *O povo português*, 1:173–174 and 2:196; Gallop, *Portugal*, 183; Luís Chaves, *Folclore religioso* (Porto: Portucalense, 1945), 176–177, 187–188; Roza de Ampudia, *Del folklore asturiano*, 191–199; Augusto César Pires de Lima and Alexandre Lima Carneiro, "A encomendação das almas," *Douro Litoral* 4:3-4 (1951): 3–21; Margot Dias and Jorge Dias, *A encomendação das almas* (Porto: Imprensa Portuguesa, 1953), 5–71; Carlos Alberto Ferreira de Almeida, "Ementação das Almas: Rezas da Ceia," *Revista da Ethnografia* 3:1 (July 1964): 41–68; Oliveira, *Festividades cíclicas*, 75–76, 225.

31. Auguste de Saint-Hilaire, *Voyage dans les provinces de Rio de Janeiro et de Minas Geraes*, 2 vols. (Paris: Grimbert et Dorez, 1830), 2:346–347.

32. Alexandre José de Mello Moraes Filho, *Festas e tradições populares do Brazil* (Rio de Janeiro: Fauchon, 1895), 219–228.

33. Lima, *Folclore*, 11–12.

34. Oswaldo Elias Xidieh, *Semana Santa Cabocla* (São Paulo: Instituto de Estudos Brasileiros, 1972), 14–33.

35. Anna Christina Farias de Carvalho, *Sob o signo da fé e da mística: Um estado das Irmandades de Penitentes no Cariri Cearense* (Fortaleza: IMPEH, 2011), 125, 159. For a visual representation of this ritual, organized by an Afro-Brazilian sisterhood in Ouro Preto (Minas Gerais), see https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=U_We6KvRGpA, accessed June 24, 2021.

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There are a number of remarkable parallels between this Iberian ritual and Rara. They both take place during Lent; they consist of long nightly processions involving music and song in call-and-response form; they serve as a form of tribute to the dead and a contract with the spirit world that, if not fulfilled, can have disastrous consequences; and they involve a series of rituals of protection against evil spirits. Similarities to Rara can also be found in the wearing of *opas* that recall the ecclesiastical garments of the major joncs, which Susan Tselos compared to chasubles.[36] Other parallels are the use of colorful streaming ribbons in reference to saints; the use of whips; the cross-dressing of certain participants; the use of funnel-shaped objects as megaphones that recall Haiti's single-note trumpets known as *vaccines*; the emphasis on Our Lady of Sorrows, corresponding to the displaying of the Mater Dolorosa on Rara banners; the drawing of signet rings on the ground that resemble Vodou spiritual diagrams known as *vévés*; the invoking of spiritual protection at crossroads and cemeteries that corresponds to Rara and Vodou rituals involving Papa Legba and Baron Samedi (guardians of the crossroads and graveyards); and the belief in wandering spirits of the dead that recall Haitian zombies. In other Iberian Lenten rituals, such as the public shaming of sinners or the burning of Judas, we find parallels to the more "carnivalesque" aspects of Rara, most notably its provocative songs full of sexual allusions and its Judas ritual.

The amalgamation of carnival and Lenten rituals, so typical for Rara, has also been observed in Iberian societies. One example is the traditional Ash Wednesday procession, led by penitents dressed as skeletons to remind people that we all began as dust and that our bodies will return to dust until we are raised up by Christ. The costume of this once deadly serious tradition that marked the first day of Lent developed over time into a popular (because cheap) carnival disguise.[37] It has also been observed in Rara. In fact, Maya Deren's famous documentary film *Divine Horsemen* (1954) ends with a scene of such a skeleton-man at a Rara parade.[38]

Much of this could be dismissed as mere coincidence if not for the fact that a large percentage of the earliest Black people, free or enslaved, to arrive in Hispaniola had previously lived in the Iberian Peninsula or on one of the Portuguese-controlled African Atlantic islands, and as Chloe Ireton has argued,

36. Susan Elizabeth Tselos, "Threads of Reflection: Costumes of Haitian Rara," *African Arts* 29:2 (Spring 1996): 61.

37. Braga, *O povo português*, 2:192; Le Gentil de la Barbinais, *Nouveau voyage autour du monde*, 3 vols. (Paris: Briasson, 1728), 3:173–174; F. Dabadie, *À travers l'Amérique du Sud* (Paris: F. Sartorius, 1859), 13 ; Felipe Ferreira, *O livro de ouro do carnaval brasileiro* (Rio de Janeiro: Ediouro, 2004), 149–150; John Charles Chasteen, *National Rhythms, African Roots: The Deep History of Latin American Popular Dance* (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 2004), 35.

38. See the film *Divine Horsemen,* https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=4Tla44ZDyZs, accessed September 28, 2021.

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are likely to have "transplanted specific Afro-Christian identities and beliefs to the New World."[39] Some degree of familiarity with Iberian brotherhood culture can also be assumed among the approximately 1,500 people of African descent who were taken by a coalition of buccaneers from Veracruz, Mexico, in 1683. The vast majority of them were abducted to Saint-Domingue.[40] We should also mention the many thousands of those who arrived in the French colony from parts of continental Africa—Kongo in particular—with a historically strong Portuguese influence.[41]

That it would be wrong to assume that all people of African descent in Hispaniola perceived Catholicism as a foreign religion of oppression is revealed in a 1662 letter to the king of Spain from Francisco de la Cueva Maldonado, archbishop of Santo Domingo, about a Maroon community in the mountains of Ocoa where runaways had built their own church, celebrated mass with their own communion wafers, placed crosses in front of their houses, and prayed the Our Father and Ave Maria, yet also "committed many errors of idolatry."[42] The earliest French Jesuits in Saint-Domingue recognized that prior to the start of their mission in 1704, some of the enslaved were already familiar with Catholic rite. Drawing on the notes of the Jesuit missionary Jean-Baptiste Le Pers, the Jesuit historian Pierre François Xavier de Charlevoix singled out three large African "nations" in Saint-Domingue, including that of the "Kongos," who "were converted some 200 years ago to Christianity by the Portuguese" and "many of whom are baptized," albeit with insufficient knowledge "of our mysteries."[43] This acknowledgment renders support to David Wheat's theory that a significant percentage of enslaved Africans were "plainly familiar with Portuguese religious culture before disembarking in the Americas."[44]

As the next section will show, Wheat's affirmation also applies to rituals associated with Holy Week traditions.

39. Chloe Ireton, "'They Are Blacks of the Caste of Black Christians': Old Christian Black Blood in the Sixteenth- and Early Seventeenth-Century Iberian Atlantic," *Hispanic American Historical Review* 97:4 (2017): 588.

40. Pablo Miguel Sierra Silva, "Afro-Mexican Women in Saint-Domingue: Piracy, Captivity, and Community in the 1680s and 1690s," *Hispanic American Historical Review* 100:1 (2020): 3–34.

41. Geggus, "The French Slave Trade," 119–138.

42. Francisco de la Cueva Maldonado to the King of Spain, September 15, 1662, Archivo General de Indias [Seville], Audiencia de Santo Domingo, leg. 93. Quoted in Carlos Larrazábal Blanco, *Los negros y la esclavitud en Santo Domingo* (Santo Domingo: Julia D. Postigo, 1975), 151–152; Milagros Ricourt, *Cimarrones: The Seeds of Subversion* (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 2020), 91.

43. Pierre François Xavier de Charlevoix, *Histoire de l'Isle Espagnole ou de S. Domingue; écrite particulièrement sur des mémoires manuscrits du P. Jean-Baptiste Le Pers*, 2 vols. (Paris: François Barois, 1730-31), 2:501.

44. David Wheat, *Atlantic Africa and the Spanish Caribbean, 1570–1640* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2016), 222.

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AFRO-IBERIAN BROTHERHOODS

As early as 1472, there is evidence of African-descendant people participating in Holy Week celebrations in the Iberian Peninsula. They did so while holding up the banner of their confraternity, that of Santiago Apóstol (St. James the Greater).[45] Church authorities stimulated the formation of such mutual aid and burial associations as a support mechanism to the catechization of newly arrived Africans.[46] Those who assumed positions of leadership in these societies typically used aristocratic titles. The 1565 charter of the Lisbon brotherhood of Our Lady of the Rosary of the Black Men, for instance, called for election of a "prince, king, duke, count, marquis, cardinal, and any other dignity."[47] In 1588, the Jesuit Simão Cardoso referred to a procession of Lisbon's Black community as people "dressed in white cloaks, and holding red staffs in their hands with such solemnity and gravity that they appear the officials of some reformed republic." They were divided according to their "nation," each of which had a banner, granted to their "elected kings."[48]

These noble titles may have had a particular appeal to Africans from Kongo, where, following the assumption to power of King Afonso I in 1506, similar Iberian aristocratic titles were used. Although few in number, there are also references to indigenous African elements in brotherhood rituals.[49] An anonymous report from 1730, for instance, mentions that the Lisbon Rosary brotherhood was composed of members of the "*nação angola*," who celebrated their patron saint with a religious service—inside the Church of Our Savior—

45. Jane Landers, *Black Society in Spanish Florida* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1999), 9.

46. António Brásio, *História e missiologia: Inéditos e esparsos* (Luanda: Instituto de Investigação Científica de Angola, 1973), 216–243; Miguel Gual Camarena, "Una cofradía de negros libertos en el siglo XV," *Estudios de la Edad Media en la Corona de Aragón* 5 (1952): 457–466; Isidoro Moreno, *La Antigua Hermandad de Los Negros de Sevilla: etnicidad, poder y sociedad en 600 años de historia* (Seville: Universidad de Sevilla, 1997); Didier Lahon, "Vivência Religiosa," in *Os Negros em Portugal – sécs. XV a XIX*, Ana Maria Rodrigues, ed. (Lisbon: Comissão Nacional para as Comemorações dos Descobrimentos Portugueses, 1999), 127–164; Bernard Vincent, "Les confréries de noirs dans la Péninsule Ibérique (XV-XVIII siècles)," in *Religiosidad y costumbres populares en Iberoamérica*, David González Cruz, ed. (Huelva, Spain: Universidad de Huelva, 2000), 17–28; Vicente Díaz Rodriguez, "La Cofradía de los Morenos y primeros años de los Dominicos en Cádiz," *Communio* 39:2 (2006), 359–484; Debra Blumenthal, "'La Casa dels Negres': Black African Solidarity in Late Medieval Valencia," in *Black Africans in Renaissance Europe*, T. F. Earle and K. J. P. Lowe, eds. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005), 225–246; Jorge Fonseca, *Religião e liberdade: Os Negros nas irmandades e confrarias portuguesas* (Vila Nova de Famalicão: Humus, 2016); Erin Kathleen Rowe, *Black Saints in Early Modern Global Catholicism* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2019), 58–65.

47. Isaias da Rosa Pereira, "Dois compromissos de irmandades de homens pretos," *Arqueologia e Historia* 9:4 (1968): 23.

48. Simão Cardoso, "Carta dos Mezes Setembro e Outubro de 88 desta Casa de São Roque da Companhia de Jesus," November 1, 1588. Quoted in Liam M. Brockey, "Jesuit Pastoral Theater on an Urban Stage: Lisbon, 1588–1593," *Journal of Early Modern History* 9:1 (2005): 32.

49. Lahon, "Vivência Religiosa," 144–148; Fonseca, *Religião e liberdade*, 78, 107–111; Isabel Castro Henriques, *A herança africana em Portugal* (Lisbon: CTT, 2009), 156; James H. Sweet, "The Hidden Histories of African Lisbon," in *The Black Urban Atlantic in the Age of the Slave Trade*, Jorge Cañizares-Esguerra, Matt D. Childs, and James Sidbury, eds. (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2013), 243–244.

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in which they played music with "marimbas, frame drums, flutes, and *berimbaus*" and afterward staged a parade in the context of which they performed "a *cumbé* dance."[50]

As a result of the Iberian maritime expansion, rituals rooted in brotherhood traditions were disseminated on a global scale, including Africa. In 1495, a church for the Black confraternity, dedicated to Our Lady of the Rosary, was established on the Cape Verdean island of Santiago. By 1612, Santiago's capital counted five confraternities, two of which were dedicated to the Black population: that of Our Lady of the Rosary and of the Holy Cross.[51] As Susana Costa confirms, it was through these channels that the Portuguese "late-medieval religious experience" reached the local population.[52] This included, as Toby Green noted, "the legacy of the Iberian anti-Semitism of the fifteenth century."[53]

Since the rituals of these societies were rooted in pre-Tridentine traditions and adapted to indigenous African customs, Portuguese newcomers in later centuries tended to perceive them with horror. This was the case, for instance, with João Vieira de Andrade, the Portuguese auditor in Cape Verde, who in 1762 complained that "in all neighborhoods women and men are elected to serve as kings and queens, who then every Sunday and holiday stage parades with their drums and flutes in order to collect money." Every year, he continued, they "have a Mass organized at their kingdom, where they are crowned by a local priest, and in their houses, they build altars, where they worship." Although these rituals were "claimed to be Catholic," Andrade advocated for the prohibition of these "scandalous abuses," which he believed to be "heathenish African customs."[54]

Research by the nineteenth-century historian Christiano Senna Barcellos revealed that brotherhoods in early modern Cape Verde not only had their own rules and regulations, but also a court of justice and even a type of army to defend

50. *Folheto de ambas Lisboas,* October 6, 1730, in Arquivo Nacional da Torre do Tombo (National Archives of Portugal), Lisbon, Folheto 7.

51. António Lourenço Farinha, *A expansão da fé na África e no Brasil: Subsídios para a história colonial* (Lisbon: Agência Geral das Colónias, 1942), 91; Maria Emília Madeira Santos and Maria João Soares, "Igreja, missionação e sociedade," in *História Geral de Cabo Verde*, Luís de Albuquerque and Maria Emília Madeira Santos, eds., 3 vols. (Lisbon: Centro de Estudos de História e Cartografia Antiga, 2001), 2:472–473.

52. Susana Goulart Costa, "Trento e o clero secular nas ilhas atlânticas," in *O Concílio de Trento em Portugal e nas suas conquistas: Olhares novos*, António Camões Gouveia, David Sampaio Barbosa, and José Pedro Paiva, eds. (Lisbon: CEHR, 2014), 199.

53. Toby Green, *The Rise of the Trans-Atlantic Slave Trade in Western Africa, 1300–1589* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012), 229.

54. Carta do ouvidor geral, João Vieira de Andrade, ao Rei D. José, July 26, 1762, in Daniel A. Pereira, *Estudos da história de Cabo Verde* (Praia, Cape Verde: Alfa-Comunicaçoes, 2005), 337–340.

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themselves against rival societies.[55] Teófilo Braga's nineteenth-century description of a Cape Verdean brotherhood celebration of St. Anthony shows that male members typically started festivities by "blowing a conch shell," whereupon young women began to collect donations. They then made "a sort of chapel, with a small altar, decorated with silk scarves in a variety of colors and panels of the saint, where they place[d] the statue of the saint" and, from there, organized processions, while "waving their banner" and "dancing to drum music." According to Braga, they "continued these celebrations for three to four weeks."[56]

Brotherhoods, today known as *tabancas*, continue to play an important role in the lives of rural Cape Verdeans and the urban poor. They display several indigenous African features, yet preserve a structure and modus operandi that correspond to medieval Portuguese customs. Tabancas are led by an elected "king" and "queen" who rule over an "army" and a "court" that includes commanders (carrying a whip), *catibos/as* (slaves), and jesters, who during performances entertain the audience with antics and songs with provocative and obscene lyrics. Although they still function as mutual aid associations with specific regulations about paying dues, attending funeral marches, holding prayers for the souls of the deceased, and helping each other in collective working groups, tabancas are today mainly associated with a belly dance known as *cola(deira)* as well as festivities in honor of their patron saints.[57]

A similar situation developed on the island of São Tomé in the Gulf of Guinea, where the Black community had its own confraternity dedicated to Our Lady of the Rosary, dating from 1526. It was a prestigious organization that had the royal privilege to purchase the freedom of any enslaved person who had proved to be a loyal member, even if against the will of the owner.[58] Annually, members celebrated the Virgin with animated festivities that lasted two weeks, the first for its free members and the second for those who were still

55. Christiano José de Senna Barcelos, *Subsídios para a história da Guiné e Cabo Verde*, 7 vols. (Lisbon: Typographia da Academia Real das Ciências de Lisboa, 1899–1913), 2:244–245.

56. Braga, *O povo português*, 2:210–211.

57. José Maria Semedo and Maria R. Turano, *Cabo Verde: O cíclo ritual das festividades da tabanca* (Praia: Speel-Edições, 1997), 13–14, 40, 62, 82, 111; Pedro Monteiro Cardoso, *Folclore Caboverdeano* (Porto: Maranus, 1933), 39–43; Félix Monteiro, "Tabanca," *Claridade: Revista de Arte e Letras* 6 (July 1948): 14–18, and 7 (December 1949): 19–26; Nelson E. Cabral, *Le moulin et le pilon: Les Îles de Cap-Vert* (Paris: L'Harmattan, 1980), 124–130; Deirdre Meintel, *Race, Culture, and Portuguese Colonialism in Cabo Verde* (Syracuse: Syracuse University Press, 1984), 144–145; Wilson Trajano Filho, "Os cortejos das tabancas: Dois modelos da ordem," in *As festas e os dias: Ritos e sociabilidades festivas*, Maria Laura Viveiros de Castro Cavalcanti and José Reginaldo Santos Gonçalves, eds. (Rio de Janeiro: Contra Capa, 2009), 37–73. For a visual representation, see https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=znOPRL7IQ2Y, accessed October 16, 2022.

58. "Carta de El-Rei D. João III" (July 9, 1526), in *Monumenta Missionária Africana: Primeira série,* António Brásio, ed., 15 vols. (Lisbon: Agência Geral do Ultramar/Academia Portuguesa da História, 1952-88), 1:472–474.

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enslaved.[59] Although rooted in Iberian traditions, the island's *lumandádgis* (from the Portuguese *irmandades*) came under pressure in later centuries by Church authorities, who classified their "plays" as "indecent profanities, supported by the devil."[60]

Brotherhoods also thrived among Luso-African communities that had developed in and around Portuguese trading posts and forts on the African continent.[61] Confraternities also accompanied the dissemination of Christianity in the Kongo region. A 1595 report from the Kongolese ambassador in Lisbon reveals that no fewer than six confraternities existed in the kingdom's capital—those of Our Lady of the Rosary, the Holy Sacrament, Saint Mary, the Immaculate Conception, the Holy Spirit, and St. Anthony. Their members gathered daily to celebrate "Masses for the souls of the dead people."[62] Membership was initially the privilege of the kingdom's elite and, therefore, highly prestigious. Those admitted to a confraternity enjoyed royal protection and could in theory not be sold into slavery.[63]

Starting in the seventeenth century, King Álvaro II and his successors stimulated the creation of confraternities, a practice that was supported by Capuchin missionaries.[64] The importance of confraternities to the Capuchins' missionary strategy is apparent in the report of Antonio de Teruel, who "established schools for the education of children and several confraternities" in Mbata that

59. Luís da Cunha Pinheiro, "O Povoamento," in *Nova História da Expansão Portuguesa*, Joel Serrão and A. H. de Oliveira Marques, eds., 11 vols. (Lisbon: Editorial Stampa, 2005), 3:256.

60. Agostinho de Santa Maria, *Santuario Mariano e história das imagẽs milagrosas de Nossa Senhora*, 10 vols. (Lisbon: Officina de Antonio Pedrozo Galraõ, 1707-23), 10:440–441.

61. Maria Manuel Ferraz Torrão, "Rotas comerciais, agentes económicos, meios de pagamento," in *História Geral de Cabo Verde*, 2:360–361; Philip J. Havik, *Silences and Soundbites: The Gendered Dynamics of Trade and Brokerage in the Pre-Colonial Guinea Bissau Region* (Münster: Lit Verlag, 2004), 133–134; Christoph Kohl, *A Creole Nation: National Integration in Guinea-Bissau* (New York: Berghahn, 2018), 50, 131–162; Ralph M. Wiltgen, *Gold Coast Mission History, 1471–1880* (Techny [Northbrook], IL: Divine Word Publications, 1956), 143–144; J. Sylvanus Wartemberg, *Sao Jorge d'El Mina, Premier West African European Settlement: Its Traditions and Customs* (Ilfracombe, UK: Stockwell, 1951), 98–99, 152–153; Pashington Obeng, *Asante Catholicism: Religious and Cultural Reproduction among the Akan of Ghana* (Leiden: Brill, 1996), 104–107.

62. "Interrogatoria de statu regni congensis facta Ulissipone" (1595), in Brásio, *Monumenta Missionária Africana*, 3:500–504.

63. "Terceira missão dos Dominicanos ao Reino do Congo" (1610), in Brásio, *Monumenta Missionária Africana*, 5:605–614; John Thornton, "The Development of an African Catholic Church in the Kingdom of Kongo, 1491–1750," *Journal of African History* 25:2 (1984): 147–167; Cécile Fromont, *The Art of Conversion: Christian Visual Culture in the Kingdom of Kongo* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2014), 202–206.

64. "Processo canónico do bispo do Congo (December 19, 1603–January 31, 1604), "Relatório da diocese do Congo e Angola" (March 11, 1609), "Terceira missão dos Dominicanos ao Reino do Congo" (1610), in Brásio, *Monumenta Missionária Africana*, 5:64–80, 524–532, 605–614; António Franco, *Synopsis Annalium Societatis Jesu in Lusitania ab 1540 usque ad annum 1725* (Augsburg: Sumptibus Philippi, Martini, & Joannis Veith, Haeredum, 1726), 250–253; Linda Heywood and John Thornton, "Central-African Leadership and the Appropriation of European Culture," in *The Atlantic World and Virginia, 1550–1624*, Peter C. Mancall, ed. (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2007), 213.

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were "modeled upon those in São Salvador."[65] In 1710, the Capuchin Bernardo da Gallo noted that members of the Rosary confraternity he had established in Bengo made "a short white vest, in the manner of the Portuguese, to attend Mass and participate in processions."[66] This decision by locals to make *opas* reveals how familiar they were with Portuguese fraternal traditions.

Similar familiarity can be noted with regard to rituals associated with the souls of the deceased. As early as 1548, we find a reference to the practice of entrusting the souls in Kongo.[67] The seventeenth-century Capuchin Andrea da Pavia was so impressed by the concern people in the Kongo kingdom had for the well-being of the souls in purgatory that he decided to establish a new confraternity in the town of Soyo, for which he built a chapel with human bones. "No one," he wrote, would ever pass in front of the chapel "without praying an Ave Maria for the poor souls."[68] Missionary reports also reveal that it was customary practice in Kongo to pay local catechists alms for a service for the soul of a deceased.[69] In his 1674 report from Soyo, the Capuchin Giuseppe Maria da Busseto reported that, on All Souls' Day, "the crowd is such that our church is too small" and that, during Lent there were "processions with numerous drums" that involved acts of "self-flagellation."[70]

The Capuchin Dionigi Carli witnessed such a scene in seventeenth-century Mbamba, where at night "a group of people sang, but in a melancholic fashion that scared me," while "carrying heavy logs of wood" for "penance." When asking the reason for this, people answered him that this was done "because it was a Friday in March," which "surprised" Carli, who apparently was unfamiliar with this Portuguese Lenten tradition. Carli opened the doors to the church, but, before entering, the penitents "stopped, kneeled during a quarter of an hour, while singing in their language the '*Salve Regina*' with very sad voices." Once inside the church, the 200 men "used the discipline with leather-thongs and bark of trees" and finished with the singing of praise songs to the Madonna.[71]

65. Mateo de Anguiano, *Misiones capuchinas en África*, 2 vols. (Madrid: Instituto Santo Toribio de Mogrevejo, 1950-57), 1:205.

66. Louis Jadin, ed., "Le Congo et la secte des Antoniens: Restauration du Royaume sous Pedro IV et la 'Saint Antoine' congolaise (1694–1718)," *Bulletin de l'Institut Historique Belge de Rome* 32 (1961): 454–459.

67. Juan Alphonso de Polanco, ed., *Vita Ignatii Loiolae et rerum Societatis Jesu historia*, 6 vols. (Madrid: Typographorum Societas, [1574] 1894-1898), 1:335.

68. Louis Jadin, ed., "Voyages apostoliques aux missions d'Afrique du P. Andrea da Pavia, Prédicateur Capucin 1685–1702," *Bulletin de L'Institut Historique Belge de Rome* XLI (1970) : 444–445.

69. Michelangelo Guattini and Dionigi Carli, *La Mission au Kongo des pères Michelangelo Guattini & Dionigi Carli*, Cheyron d'Abzac, trans. (Paris: Chandeigne, 2006), 237; Luca da Caltanissetta, *Diaire Congolais,* François Bontick, ed. (Louvain: Editions Nauwelaerts, 1970), 62.

70. "Giuseppe Maria da Busseto au procureur général," April 18, 1674, in Jadin, *Rivalités luso-néerlandaises*, 291–292.

71. Guattini and Carli, *La Mission au Kongo*, 125.

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Similar practices thrived in nineteenth-century Guinea-Bissau, where the Portuguese officer Augusto Dias de Carvalho noted that on the eve of All Saints' Day, people "unite in front of the church, and from there they proceed with torches in procession through the streets, mixing Ave Marias with indigenous songs," while wearing "fantastic costumes, as if it was carnival." These parades ended with the praying of "Ave-Marias for the souls of all the deceased." When Carvalho asked why they celebrated All Souls' Day in such a way, people answered that "it was because of the catechization of the first missionaries."[72] As George Brooks rightly observed, Carvalho's decision to subsequently reach out to the ecclesiastical authorities, with a request to "put an end to this expression of contempt for our religion" is not devoid of irony, considering that the ritual he witnessed had been "practiced by Portuguese in medieval times."[73]

Another clear parallel to Haitian Rara can be found in the 1764 complaint from the Portuguese administrator João Gomes Ferreira about the "scandalous abuses, crimes, and transgressions by the so-called kingdoms or rosary fraternities" in Cape Verde, whose members "during Holy Week from Maundy Thursday until the Sunday of Easter go around, asking for donations in the name of Our Lady of the Rosary" and in "their churches organize vigils" where "they eat, drink, and sleep" and claim that all of this occurred "out of devotion to the saints."[74]

The clearest parallels to Rara can be found on the island of São Tomé, where participation in Holy Week performances has traditionally been considered a form of ex-voto, locally known as *paga devê* (to pay what you owe). The *Sete Estações* (Seven Stations), with its prayers to the souls in purgatory, tends to be a quiet performance, differing from the *Plo Mon Dessu*, allegedly derived from the Portuguese *Pela Mão de Deus* (By God's Hand).[75] Although the Plo Mon Dessu tradition was prohibited by the authorities in 1958, the Portuguese journalist Fernando Reis delivered a detailed description in the 1960s, explaining that it involved "the careful decoration of an altar" with "statues of Catholic saints," where at night brotherhood members gathered to "pray and sing in Latin . . . accompanied by a choir." From there departed "boisterous

72. Henrique Augusto Dias de Carvalho, *Guiné: Apontamentos inéditos* (Lisbon: Agência Geral das Colónias, 1944), 74–75.

73. George E. Brooks, "The Observance of All Souls' Day in the Guinea-Bissau Region: A Christian Holy Day, An African Harvest Festival, an African New Year's Celebration, or All of the Above (?)," *History in Africa* 11 (1984): 3.

74. "Carta do desembargador João Gomes Ferreira," 1764, in Pereira, *Estudos da história*, 337–341.

75. The term "*plo mon dessu*" (by God's hand) may be based on a misunderstanding. A common expression in brotherhood rituals on the island is "*pló-mô-Dêssu*," as derived from the Portuguese "*pelo amor de Deus*" ("for the love of God" or "for Christ's sake"). It is possible that this expression was wrongly transcribed as "mon" (hand) instead of "mô" (love) and mistakenly taken for the tradition's name. See José de Almada Negreiros, *História ethnográphica da ilha de S. Thomé* (Lisbon: Bastos, 1895), 165, 313.

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groups of dancers, dressed in extravagant ways, some wearing women's clothes, colorful, with enormous hats," accompanied by bands "playing drums, scraping *canzás*, and rhythmically beating a piece of iron." They sang "improvised songs, full of malicious allusions and lascivious scoffs" and frequently stopped to "ask the audience for donations." According to Reis, these parades related to the crucifixion narrative in the sense that the cheerful singing and dancing symbolized "the joy of Christ's enemies over His death."[76]

Other parallels to Rara can be found in the *Stlevas*, as derived from the Portuguese *Trevas* (Latin *Tenebrae*), when, on the Eve of Maundy Thursday, groups parade with music and songs marked by sexual allusions in order to publicly shame "sinners." As recently as the late twentieth century, we find references to groups of people carrying around *mamiangus Zuda* (straw effigies of Judas), on Good Friday that are insulted and later violently destroyed by a crowd shouting *"bamu dumú Zuda. . . Zuda sê vlegonha . . . Ku bêndê Clixto tomá djêlo"* ("We will destroy Judas . . . The shameless Judas . . . Who sold Christ for money").[77]

These references confirm that rituals inspired by Iberian Lenten celebrations thrived in Black communities in the Iberian Peninsula and parts of Africa with a historically strong Portuguese influence. This allows us to acquire a better understanding of Afro-Iberian brotherhood traditions on the island of Hispaniola.

GAGÁ AND THE DOMINICAN BROTHERHOODS

As we have seen, Eugène Aubin, in his description of the Judas ritual in Rara, pointed to a parallel custom in the Dominican Republic. This connection is all the more important considering that, probably in the early twentieth century, Haitian immigrants introduced Rara parades in the eastern part of Hispaniola, where this performance tradition became known as *Gagá*.[78] Studies on Gagá frequently made references to brotherhoods. June Rosenberg, for instance, noted in her pioneering study from 1979 that "several characteristics of Gagá existed historically. . . in confraternities," while Jan Lundius observed that "in the Dominican Republic, the rara groups are called *gagá* and are often

76. Fernando Reis, *Pôvô flogá: Folclore de São Tomé e Príncipe* (São Tomé: Câmara Municipal, 1969), 19–22.

77. António Maria de Jesus Castro e Moraes. *Um breve esboço dos costumes de S. Thomé e Príncipe* (Lisbon: Typ. Adolpho de Mendonça, 1901), 29–30; Pedro Paulo Alves Pereira, *Das Tchiloli von São Tomé: Die Wege des karolingischen Universums* (Frankfurt am Main: IKO, 2002), 285–286; Conceição Lima, "A quadra da Páscoa nas ilhas e na memória," *Téla Non* (April 4, 2021), https://www.telanon.info/suplemento/opiniao/2021/04/04/33974/a-quadra-da-pascoa-nas-ilhas-e-na-memoria/, accessed November 4, 2022.

78. José Francisco Alegría-Pons, *Gagá y Vudú en la República Dominicana: ensayos antropológicos* (Santo Domingo: El Chango Prieto, 1993), 19–20.

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organized as a kind of religious fraternity where the members are bound together by different kinds of vows."[79]

These references call for a closer look at Martha Davis's groundbreaking research on Afro-Dominican fraternity customs, in particular the *salva* (a song and dance performance of the "*Salve Regina*") and the *velación* (feast in honor of a saint). According to Davis, these performances are "a continuation of a Spanish phenomenon dating back to the fifteenth century," yet executed by groups led by a king, queen, and other notables that "are Hispanicized forms of the royal courts of the Kongo." They are intimately related to the fulfillment of vows to saints and, during Lent or whenever one of the members dies, special drums are used to accompany prayers for the souls in purgatory, with phrases such as "*Oigan mis voces, ay - é, del purgatorio*" (Listen to my voices from purgatory). Of particular interest are their nightly processions, known as *Estaciones* or *Noches de Vela*, that in areas such as the Sierra de Bahoruco "are related to those of the 'Gagá' during Lent and Holy Week."[80]

As Davis rightly observed, these nightly processions, organized by Afro-Dominican brotherhoods, resemble Gagá parades. Gagé is recognizably different, most notably in its use of Haitian Creole, which is only natural considering that these parades were introduced in the twentieth century by immigrants from the western part of Hispaniola, which since 1625 had experienced a different political, cultural, and religious history. In spite of this, the parallels with Afro-Dominican brotherhood rituals remain clearly visible to this day.

Evidence of the connections between Gagá practices and brotherhood rituals can also be found in Rosenberg's reference to the wearing of burial shrouds (*mortajas*) on Maundy Thursday and to the "baptism ritual" of Gagá objects in preparation for the Good Friday weekend, which "resembles Catholic rite" with its holy water, godparents, and someone "dressed like a *prête savanne* [bush priest] as Haitians call [the person] known here as *rezador*."[81] Additional evidence on the role of the *prête savanne* can be found in Melville Herskovits' classic study on the Haitian Valley of Mirebelais from the 1930s. Despite hostility of the Catholic Church toward "bush priests," Herskovits showed that these laypeople were highly important to local communities in setting up home altars, marrying

79. June C. Rosenberg, *El Gagá: religión y sociedad de un culto dominicano; un estudio comparativo* (Santo Domingo, Colección Historia y sociedad, 1979), 40; Jan Lundius, *The Great Power of God in San Juan Valley: Syncretism and Messianism in the Dominican Republic* (Lund, Sweden: Religionshistoriska avdelningen, Lunds Universitet, 1995), 77.

80. Martha Ellen Davis, *Voces del purgatorio: estudio de la salve dominicana* (Santo Domingo: Museo del Hombre Dominicano, 1981), 35, 39–41, 78; Martha Ellen Davis, "La religiosidad popular del Suroeste," in *Ruta hacia Liborio: mesianismo en el Sur Profundo dominicano*, Martha Ellen Davis, ed. (Santo Domingo: Editora Manatí, 2004), 107, 117–119.

81. Rosenberg, *El Gagá*, 116–117.

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people, reciting novenas, singing canticles (in fractured Latin), and organizing burials and baptisms.[82]

This connection between Gagá and baptism allows a new perspective on the historical development of Rara and its traditional burning of Judas effigies on Holy Saturday by associating these practices with Moreau's observation that Easter Eve used to be a day of particular importance to the enslaved population in Saint-Domingue because it coincided with the mass baptism of African newcomers. The latter was common practice in Catholic societies in the Americas, in accordance with a tradition of the early Church, when Christians used to gather on the afternoon of Holy Saturday to confer the sacrament of baptism on catechumens—converts to Christianity who had spent Lent preparing to be received into the Church. Hence also the importance of godparents, who, as Moreau noted, "enjoy so much respect among them" that "the worst possible insult for a Black person" was to "insult one's godmother."[83] Félix Carteau confirmed that baptism was of great importance to the Black population in eighteenth-century Saint-Domingue. According to the French merchant, the island's Black community firmly believed in the existence of "an evil devil, a paradise, and a hell," to the point that the main source of income of Catholic priests arose from "Masses the Black people paid them for." An important role in the transmission of such beliefs was played by Black females, who "adopted" newly arrived Africans "as soon as they spoke a little French" and, after "catechizing them," became their "godmothers," to whom they remained attached as if they were "their second mothers."[84]

Other sources confirm the importance of baptism and the prestige of godparents in Afro-Caribbean communities. Charlevoix mentioned in his *Histoire de l'Isle Espagnole ou de S. Domingue* (1730-31) that newly arrived Africans in Saint-Domingue were so eager to be baptized that nothing annoyed them more than missionaries "postponing baptism . . . until they[we]'re sufficiently instructed."[85] Jean-Baptiste Labat, procurator-general of the Dominican convents in the Antilles, referred in his *Nouveau Voyage* (1722) to a Black man who had so much authority over his godchildren that he did not hesitate to whip those who did not know their prayers.[86] Another Dominican,

82. Melville J. Herskovits, *Life in a Haitian Valley* (New York: Knopf, 1937), 113, 141, 144, 157, 177, 207–213, 272, 277, 288. On the role of the *prête savanne*, see also Vanhee, "Central African Popular Christianity," 262; Ricourt, *Cimarrones*, 109.

83. Moreau de Saint-Méry, *La description*, 1:55.

84. Félix Carteau, *Soirées bermudiennes, ou entretiens sur les événemens qui ont opéré la ruine de la partie française de l'isle Saint-Domingue* (Bordeaux: Pellier-Lawalle, 1802), 81.

85. Charlevoix, *Histoire de l'Isle Espagnole,* 2:502.

86. Jean-Baptiste Labat, *Nouveau voyage aux isles de l'Amerique contenant l'histoire naturelle de ces pays, l'origine, les moeurs, la religion & le gouvernement des habitans anciens & modernes*, 6 vols. (Paris: Chez P. F. Giffart, 1722), 4:146–147.

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Jean-Baptiste Du Tertre, noted that nothing excited the enslaved in the seventeenth-century French Antilles more than "the baptism of their children," to which ceremony they used to invite "all the people of their country."[87]

The importance of baptism to the enslaved population becomes clearer if we relate the ritual to Moreau's observation that "newly arrived *bozals*" tended to be disdained by the colony's Christianized Blacks, who condescendingly referred to them as "*chevaux*" (horses) because they "had not yet been baptized." For this reason, he explained, the "latter are in a hurry to get baptized" so they can "liberate themselves from the insults addressed at the non-baptized."[88] That Moreau used here the Spanish term *bozal* is indicative of the Iberian influence on such practices. Equally important is that the most common nickname for such unbaptized Africans in Iberian colonial societies was "Jew." As Lydia Cabrera confirms, "those who had not received a Catholic baptism were known as Jews" and were therefore "buried separately, together with the 'Jewish' children, those who had died before receiving baptism."[89] For this reason, Martha Davis stresses that, in spite of the fact that "the assumption that the Jews killed Christ was disseminated by the Spanish Catholic Church," references to Jews in performances in Hispaniola should not be understood as meaning "Jews in a literal sense" but as "a synonym for pagans."[90]

When seen from this perspective, the ritual burning of "the Jew" on the same day as the mass baptism of African newcomers becomes clearer. It suggests that the violent destruction of effigies of Judas, while embedded in centuries-old anti-Semitic stereotypes, was not directed against Jews as such, but instead represented a Christian victory over pagan forces. To this day, there exist countless performances in Latin America involving Black communities, typically organized in brotherhoods, that stage a mock battle between Christian and pagan/devilish/Moorish forces, ending with the latter's baptism. While the best-known examples are probably those of the Afro-Brazilian *congados* (Kongo societies), variants also existed, and still exist, on the African Atlantic islands and in other parts of the Americas, such as Panama.[91] As Judith Bettelheim

87. Jean-Baptiste Du Tertre, *Histoire générale des Antilles habitées par les françois*, 4 vols. (Paris: Thomas Iolly, 1667–71), 2:526–528.

88. Moreau de Saint-Méry, *La description*, 1:55. For a similar case in Curaçao, where unbaptized Africans used to be nicknamed "*bouriques*" (asses), see Michael Joannes Alexius Schabel, "'Notitia de Coraçao, Bonayre, Oruba' (1705) and 'Diurnum' (1707–1708)," Christine W. M. Schunck, ed., *Archivum Historicum Societatis Iesu*, 56:131 (January-June 1997): 139.

89. Lydia Cabrera, *Reglas de Congo, palo monte, mayombe* (Miami: Peninsular Printing, 1979), 23, 63.

90. Davis, "La religiosidad popular," 120. In the context of the Liborista movement, followers of Papá Liborio (a self-proclaimed incarnate of Christ who was killed during the United States occupation of the Dominican Republic in the 1920s) prayed for protection against the "Jews," an evil entity, which, as Lundius explained, "had nothing to do with real Jews." Lundius, *The Great Power*, 191.

91. Luís da Câmara Cascudo, *Dicionário do folclore brasileiro* (São Paulo: Melhoramentos, 1979), 242–245; Francisco van der Poel, *Dicionário da religiosidade popular: Cultura e religião no Brasil* (Curitiba: Nossa Cultura, 2013), 241–245; José Rivair Macedo, "Mouros e Cristãos: A ritualização da conquista no velho e no Novo Mundo,"

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confirms, the latter developed out of "a form of Christianity, particular to areas of West-Central Africa [that] arrived in the Americas along with the slave trade."[92] According to Ronald Smith, *congados* in Panama operate in an ancient brotherhood tradition and "maintain a communal sense of society throughout the year."[93] Their performances typically take place around Lent and include a queen, king, and prince, devils, angels, and a *Capitán de Congo*. The enactment of a battle between angelic Christians and devilish pagans ends with the capturing of the latter, who subsequently choose a godparent and are baptized by a *padre Congo*.[94]

To understand why such practices came to be embraced by the Black population, it is also important to emphasize the role of laypeople and brotherhoods in the Christianization of enslaved Africans. Significantly, Guillaume Moreau, Jesuit superior of the Guadeloupe mission in 1706-10, noted that it was Black Christians who taught newly arrived Africans "the prayers . . . , t[ook] them to church and to catechism, ma[de] them attend Mass, . . . [and] observe the ceremonies, . . . often repeating to them that, having been brutes as they are, they have become children of God." It was, thus, members of the Black community themselves, who "by dint of laying siege to them, telling them so by reason, by example, and by invitations . . . persuade [newly arrived Africans] to ask for baptism." Whenever they succeeded, they took the Africans to a priest, who then put "them in the hand of one of the Negro catechists" and "finally granted them baptism when he felt that they were well prepared."[95] In 1718, the Jesuit Jean Chrétien referred to "*pères noirs* [Black fathers]," who, whenever new Africans arrived, "come to see them and teach them how to make the Cross." Thanks to their efforts, he argued, the newcomers soon "learn that baptism gives them a sort of relief."[96]

BUCEMA 2 (2008): 2–10; Cécile Fromont, "Dancing for the King of Congo from Early Modern Central Africa to Slavery-Era Brazil," *Colonial Latin American Review* 22:2 (2013): 184–208; Jeroen Dewulf, *From the Kingdom of Kongo to Congo Square: Kongo Dances and the Origins of the Mardi Gras Indians* (Lafayette: University of Louisiana at Lafayette Press, 2017), 65–78; Gerhard Seibert, "Performing Arts of São Tomé and Príncipe," in *African Folklore: An Encyclopedia*, Philip M. Peek and Kwesi Yankah, eds. (New York: Routledge, 2004), 680–687.

92. Judith Bettelheim, "Carnaval of Los Congos of Portobelo, Panama: Feathered Men and Queens," in *African Diasporas in the New and Old Worlds: Consciousness and Imagination*, Geneviève Fabre and Klaus Benesch, eds. (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 2004), 288. For a visual representation, see https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=rcg-OmRdUsY&t=117s, accessed June 24, 2021.

93. Ronald R. Smith, "Arroz Colorao: Los Congos of Panama," in *Music and Black Ethnicity: The Caribbean and South America*, Gerard H. Béhague, ed. (New Brunswick, NJ: Transaction, 1992), 239.

94. John M. Lipski, *The Speech of the Negros Congos of Panama (*Amsterdam and Philadelphia: John Benjamins Publishing Company, 1989), 67–114; Renee Alexander Craft, *When the Devil Knocks: The Congo Tradition and the Politics of Blackness in Twentieth-Century Panama* (Columbus: Ohio State University Press, 2015), 56–107.

95. Guillaume Moreau, "Mémoires concernant la mission des pères de la Compagnie de Jesus dans les isles françoises de l'Amérique" (1709), Bibliothèque Mazarine, Fonds Marcel Châtillon, Ant Ms 9-1, 4v-5r. Quoted in Sue Peabody, "A Dangerous Zeal: Catholic Missions to Slaves in the French Antilles, 1635–1800," *French Historical Studies* 25:1 (Winter 2002): 67.

96. Jean Chrétien, "Lettres d'un missionnaire de la Compagnie de Jésus à un père de la même Compagnie écrites de Cayenne en Amérique les années 1718 et 1719," Bibliothèque Méjanes, Aix-en-Provence, Ms 116 (406-R293), fol. 47. Quoted in Everlyn Wiesinger, "Acteurs et échanges linguistiques dans les premiers temps en Guyane française coloniale:

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It is tempting to assume that this important role of catechists made those Africans already well versed in Catholic rites before their arrival in the Americas prestigious members of the community, and, as Vincent Brown suggested, "key interpreters of missionary doctrine to other slaves."[97] It is likely not by accident that the Jesuit missionary Pedro Claver surrounded himself in seventeenth-century Cartagena with catechists such as Manuel de Capo Verde and the Kongolese Catholic José Monzolo. The Kimbundu-speaking Ignacio Angola even declared that, together with Alonso Angola, he had been brought to Cartagena on purpose to assist the Jesuits as a catechist.[98] Thornton is therefore convinced that "the impact of African Christians was much greater than their numbers" in the sense that they disseminated among other Africans in the diaspora beliefs and customs rooted in Afro-Catholic traditions.[99]

Since these Afro-Atlantic Catholics brought to America a form of Christianity characterized by a firm belief in purgatory, they likely felt a need to observe a set of rituals to redeem the souls of the deceased. The most logical response to this need was the formation of brotherhoods. That this occurred even in places where the Catholic Church was absent can be illustrated with Christian Oldendorp's report from the Danish Virgin Islands in the 1760s. It reveals that "among Black people who came from Portuguese countries . . . particularly those from Kongo" it was common to perform "a kind of baptism" not only for members of their own nation but also for "those *bozals* who desire this," albeit that the latter first "had to receive five to six lashes from the baptizer, for the sins [they] had committed in Africa." This humiliating whipping ritual, which unbaptized Africans had to undergo before being welcomed into the Afro-Catholic community, was followed by "a celebration of the Black community" that involved "godparents," who had adopted "those whom they have baptized as their children and look after them as best they can, especially when they pass away, because then they provide them with a coffin and burial clothing."[100] As Jon Sensbach has noted, the fact that these Afro-Catholic Kongolese catechists catered to the needs of newly arrived Africans and

Contribution à l'étude de la genèse du créole guyanais," *Creolica* (May 22, 2013), http://www.creolica.net/article-80.html, accessed September 27, 2022.

97. Vincent Brown, *The Reaper's Garden: Death and Power in the World of Atlantic Slavery* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2008), 223.

98. Anna Maria Splendiani and Tulio Aristizábal, eds., *Proceso de beatificación y canonización de San Pedro Claver: Edición de 1696* (Bogotá: CEJA, 2002), 88, 108–109, 113, 222–225.

99. John Thornton, *Africa and Africans in the Making of the Atlantic World, 1400–1800* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), 254, 262.

100. Christian Georg Andreas Oldendorp, *Historie der caribischen Inseln Sanct Thomas, Sanct Crux und Sanct Jan, insbesondere der dasigen Neger und der Mission der evangelischen Brüder unter denselben*, Gudrun Meier, Stephan Palmié, Peter Stein, and Horst Ulbricht, eds., 2 vols. (Berlin: VWB, 2000), 1:445–448,647, 741–743, and 2:2, 758.

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organized baptisms and funerals suggests that they operated in the context of mutual aid and burial societies modeled on Iberian brotherhoods.[101]

A similar phenomenon occurred on the island of Trinidad, where in 1853 the *Port of Spain Gazette* reported on "Africans of the Congo nation, who have associated themselves together as 'the Congo society,'" and, "when any of the society die . . . the dead body is brought to this yard to be 'waked.'"[102] In a letter from 1885, Father Marie Bertrand de Cothonay provided a detailed description of such a society in Saint-Dominic-Village, claiming that they "celebrate their patron saint extensively." They did so by organizing processions with "flags, musical instruments, firecrackers . . . the women recite the rosary, the men sing the litanies of the saints"; and, after Mass, "the king of the society appears with his diadem of gilded paper" and "the queen . . . whose function it is to distribute the blessed bread."[103]

We could also point to Jamaica, where the Baptist missionary James Phillippo in 1843 reported the presence of Afro-Christian "fraternities" that clandestinely organized missionary activities by sending out disciples, who travelled "by night to avoid apprehension" and "communicated their instructions from house to house." When fraternity members fell ill, "the minister, or father, as he was usually called, anointed them with oil in imitation of the anointing of the Saviour by Mary Magdalene before his crucifixion." He did so "by pouring it into the palm of the hand, and rubbing it on the head of the patient; the *tata*, or father, singing some ditty during the operation, being joined in loud chorus by all who assembled." Phillippo added that "these infatuated men professed a firm belief in purgatory, and, like the Romish priests, pretended an acquaintance with the destinies of the deceased."[104] His use of the Kikongo term *tata* for father confirms a Kongolese connection.

As Sue Peabody has shown, there existed also in the French Caribbean a desire to develop "an autonomous Black Catholic community," reflected in "attempts to found Black confraternities."[105] There are, in fact, indications that even before the 1791 revolution, Afro-Catholic communities in Saint-Domingue had formed their own societies, outside of Church control. In 1761, for instance, the authorities in Cap-Français issued an ordinance warning that Black people had "constituted distinct congregations" that "often mixed holy elements of our

101. Jon F. Sensbach, *Rebecca's Revival: Creating Black Christianity in the Atlantic World* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2005), 92–93.

102. *Port of Spain Gazette,* November 12, 1853.

103. Marie Bertrand de Cothonay, *Trinidad: Journal d'un missionnaire dominicain des Antilles anglaises* (Paris: V. Retaux et fils, 1893), 64, 303–304.

104. James M. Phillippo, *Jamaica: Its Past and Present State* (Philadelphia: J. M. Campbell, 1843), 103–104.

105. Peabody, "A Dangerous Zeal," 88–90.

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religion with profane objects of an idolatrous cult." They gathered in churches, where they established their "own choir leaders, beadles, and church wardens." They "catechize[d] and preach[ed]" and went "into the suburbs to catechize in the houses and dwellings without having authorization to do so."[106] An anonymous report from 1785, from Haiti's North Province, also mentions that Black people had their own "gathering places, kings, and queens," and paid "a subscription of several *portugaises* and burial fees" to ensure that after their death they would be buried with "large processions."[107] In 1791, an unidentified French militiaman reported that "the Negroes . . . assumed titles, and the titled Blacks were treated with great respect"; a "Capuchin called Cajetan was retained among them," who "has been obliged to officiate. Their colors were consecrated and a king was elected. They have chosen one for each quarter."[108] Father Lecum, an observer of the revolution, noted that "all the churches . . . are burnt [and] all missionaries except five have died," yet "in most parishes, Black people took pieces of holy ornaments and sacred vessels, and, though they don't know how to read, administered all the sacraments themselves and even celebrated Masses."[109] Of particular importance to the history of Rara are the parallels to the Iberian practice of entrusting the souls in the 1730 description of an "extravagant masquerade" by members of the island's Black community, who, around the time of carnival, paraded in "long robes," similar to those "of priests," and carried "candles" in a "lugubrious" march that reminded the French eyewitness of a "funeral."[110]

In spite of the fact that the Catholic Church had abandoned the island in the aftermath of the revolution, the English abolitionist John Candler observed in 1841 how locals had built a "household altar dedicated to the Virgin, and strewed with crosses, where the poor devotees of the little settlement repair to pay their devotions" including "a page or two of a missal or some Romish legend . . . placed in due order on a table before the crucifix."[111] The Haitian historian Thomas Madiou also noted in the 1840s that in rural parts of the island, groups known as "saints" followed a type of Vodou "in the shape of Roman Catholicism" and violently persecuted members of other Vodou

106. "Arrêt de Réglement du Conseil du Cap" (February 18, 1761), in Médéric L.E. Moreau de Saint-Méry, *Loix et constitutions des colonies françoises de l'Amérique sous le vent*, 6 vols. (Paris: Chez l'auteur, 1784-90), 4:352–355.

107. Archives Nationales d'Outre-Mer, Aix-en-Provence, F3/133, fols. 478-479. Quoted in David Geggus, "The Slaves and Free People of Color of Cap Français," in *The Black Urban Atlantic in the Age of the Slave Trade*, 118.

108. "San Domingo Disturbances," *Philadelphia General Advertiser,* October 11, 1791. Quoted in John Thornton, "'I am the Subject of the King of Kongo': African Political Ideology and the Haitian Revolution," *Journal of World History* 4:2 (1993): 208.

109. Adolphe Cabon, *Notes sur l'Histoire Religieuse d'Haïti: De la Révolution au Concordat* (Port-au-Prince: Petit Séminaire Collège St. Martial, 1933), 91.

110. Pierre de Vaissière, *Saint-Domingue, la société et la vie créoles sous l'ancien régime, 1629-1789* (Paris: Perrin et Comp. Libraires-Éditeurs, 1909), 264.

111. John Candler, *Brief Notices of Hayti: With its Condition, Resources, and Prospects* (London: T. Ward, 1842), 150.

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groups, known as "*guyons*" or "*loups-garous*" (werewolves), who allegedly practiced anthropophagy.[112] François Eldin, a Protestant missionary, observed that in reaction to the 1860 earthquake on Easter Sunday, groups of people appeared with "banners, images of saints, crucifixes, and relics," and "marched through the streets and the countryside in procession."[113]

These references illustrate how easily one can come to wrong conclusions by reducing the history of Catholicism in Haiti to a history of oppression. They also suggest that, similar to what occurred in the Virgin Islands, Trinidad, and Jamaica, Afro-Catholic communities in Haiti operated autonomously and did so in the context of mutual aid and burial societies modeled on Afro-Iberian brotherhoods. As Jorge Cañizares-Esguerra, Matt Childs, and James Sidbury have noted, "approved institutional structures authorized by the Catholic Church were not always necessary for Africans and their descendants to build fraternal structures."[114] The assumption that enslaved Africans who were familiar with Iberian practices prior to their arrival in the Americas established, by their own initiative, informal networks of brotherhoods in order to secure mutual aid, guarantee a decent funeral, and honor rituals for the souls of the deceased, provides a credible explanation for the parallels we identified between Rara and late medieval Lenten traditions from the Iberian peninsula. As will be shown in the next section, this theory is supported by connections between Rara and the mutual aid and burial societies known in Haiti as *Sociétés Congo* (Kongo societies).

KONGO SOCIETIES

While attending the 1841 carnival parades in Haiti, Victor Schoelcher observed several "companies," each with "its own flag and king, who wears a feathered turban as his crown and a rich suit over which is a cloak of satin embellished with golden and silver sequins."[115] His description not only recalls the typical outfit of a Rara king but also corresponds to Seabrook's description of "Congo societies" that paraded with "banners," "queens," and "kings" who wore "a high crown of yellow feathers with little pieces of mirror sewn." Seabrook characterized these societies as a "sort of agricultural guild, primitive yet highly organized" that was presided over by a "queen with her council and court," who "preserved order among them, settled disputes, [and] dispensed justice."

112. Thomas Madiou, *Histoire d'Haïti*, 8 vols. (Port-au-Prince: Editions Fardin, 1981), 8:318.

113. F. Eldin, *Haïti: Treize ans de séjour aux Antilles* (Toulouse: Société des Livres Religieux, 1878), 225.

114. Cañizares-Esguerra, Childs, and Sidbury, eds., "Introduction," in *The Black Urban Atlantic in the Age of the Slave Trade,* 9.

115. Schoelcher, *Colonies étrangères,* 2:299–300.

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He also recorded that "Queen Ti Meminne's" society had its own "army," "flag-bearer," and people "beating their drums" and "blowing their conch-shells" and that there were "various allied Congo Societies, the *Belle Étoile*, *Fleur de Jeunesse*, *Reservée la Famille*, *Sainte Trinité*."[116]

These "agricultural guilds" are commonly known in Haiti as *combites*, and, as Dunham confirmed, "the Rara dance may be comprised of the same individuals who form a work society or *combite*. The Congo Society at Dessources, for instance, invaded our Plains territory *vendredi saint*."[117] Research by Michel Laguerre and Wade Davis confirmed this intimate connection between combites and Rara performances. However, their assumption that the former "had their genesis in the isolated communities of escaped slaves" and should be understood as continuities of "sorcerer societies of West Africa" deserves to be questioned.[118] If these societies had developed among Maroons, who, in their isolation, remained attached to indigenous African "sorcerer" traditions, one wonders why their members would sing songs starting with the words "Mother the Virgin, we are your children," wear the sign of a cross on their backs, carry a type of passport with Catholic prayers, display Catholic symbols on their banners (saints, crosses, lambs, and references to the Virgin in the form of a star or rose), and have explicitly Catholic names (*Sainte Trinité*) or names referring to parts of Africa with a historically strong Portuguese influence, such as Kongo. We could also refer to the Sociétés Bizango/Bisago, whose name relates to the Bissago Islands (or Bijagós), an archipelago located off the coast of Guinea-Bissau, in close proximity to the Cape Verdean Islands and Cacheu, the earliest Portuguese settlement on the nearby mainland.[119]

Parallels to Afro-Iberian brotherhoods are clearly evidenced in the structure and mode of operation of these societies. Every characteristic named by Robert Hall in his pioneering study on Haitian Kongo societies corresponds to a characteristic of a brotherhood: 1) they function as "cooperative labor groups"; 2) members "pay dues" that are kept in a safe box; 3) they offer social protection as "mutual benefit societies"; 4) they provide social entertainment and have "their own music, songs, dances, insignia, costumes, archives . . . ceremonies . . . and banners"; 5) they perform "disciplinary and religious

116. Seabrook, *The Magic Island*, 185–187, 191–193. Note the parallels between Seabrook's description of the society's headgear and that of the Afro-Brazilian *congado* (Kongo society) in this visual representation, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=icvdQTY5hcI, accessed June 30, 2021.

117. Dunham, *Dances of Haiti*, 32.

118. Michel Laguerre, "Bizango: A Voodoo Secret Society in Haiti," in *Secrecy: A Cross-Cultural Perspective*, Stanton K. Tefft, ed. (New York: Human Science Press, 1980), 155; Wade Davis, *Passage of Darkness: The Ethnobiology of the Haitian Zombie* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1988), 237, 282.

119. Laguerre, "Bizango," 152; Davis, *Passage of Darkness*, 264.

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functions"; 6) they are ruled by "an elaborate array of officers," who use titles (emperor, king, prince, queen, etc.) and symbols (swords, crowns, etc.) rooted in European medieval traditions; 7) each member of the society is assured a proper funeral/coffin and burial ceremonies involve "a great deal of mourning, singing, dancing, and drinking"; and 8) social engagement is kept "through the celebration of Saints' days, funerals, 'placements,' and other events" such as parades "in single file," with "each member wearing the formal insignia or costume of his office" and with "the cross and the saints . . . in evidence."[120]

It is also important to stress that combites are not a uniquely Haitian phenomenon. The same type of organization is common in Cape Verde, where it is known as *junta mão* (joining hands), and in Latin America, under the various names *cambiamanos* (changing hands), *juntas*, or *convites*. As Davis pointed out with regard to the Dominican Republic, these organizations are known for their attachment to *salves* and *noches de vela*, which reinforces the theory that Gagá and Rara developed out of ancient Afro-Catholic brotherhood rituals.[121]

Moreover, the earliest known reference to these collective working groups in a non-Iberian Caribbean context does not come from Haiti but from Curaçao, where Dutch authorities in 1741 and in 1750 intervened against "so-called combites," in the context of which "Black people and Mulattoes . . . played their drums, fiddles and other instruments, raised their flags" and fought out rivalries with "fellow *combites* . . . by attacking each other with fists, sticks, stones, knives and other weapons."[122] While these organizations have ceased to exist in Curaçao, their legacy lives on in *sociedads di caha*, mutual aid and burial societies that, in exchange for a monthly fee, guarantee a coffin, a decent burial, and prayers for the soul of the deceased. Like brotherhoods, they have their own banners and are named after their patron saints, such as San Pedro, San Hosé, La Birgen Nos Mama, or Santa Lucia.[123]

Connecting Rara to Kongo societies, combites, and, subsequently, to Afro-Iberian brotherhoods clarifies much of the scenery. It not only helps us to understand traces of late medieval Iberian practices (entrusting the souls, vows, rituals to safeguard oneself from evil spirits at crossroads, for example) but also allows us to explain the Judas ritual in connection to the mass baptism of

120. Robert Burnett Hall, "The Société Congo of the Ile à Gonave," *American Anthropologist* 31:4 (October-December 1929): 690–692.

121. Davis, *Voces del purgatorio*, 45.

122. "Verbod" (June 7, 1741) and "Reglement" (July 24/28, 1750), in Schiltkamp and De Smidt, *West-Indisch Plakaatboek*, 1:218, 271.

123. Paul Brenneker, *Curaçaoensia: Folkloristische aantekeningen over Curaçao* (Curaçao: Boekhandel St. Augustinus, 1961), 17; Brenneker, *Sambumbu*, 5:1107 and 10:2487–2489.

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recently arrived Africans on Holy Saturday. Other parallels can be made in connection to Cape Verdean tabancas, where the rhythmic blowing of conch shells and the dancing of *coladeiras* recall the Haitian *lambis* and *danses du ventre*, respectively. A less friendly parallel are the historical rivalries between Rara bands, such as those between Ti-Malis and La Fleur de Rose in Léogâne which, as McAlister explained, can lead to an "all-out physical battle."[124]

Based on these many parallels, the assumption that Haitian Kongo societies developed "in isolation" and that their combites are, as Herskovits phrased it, "pure retentions of African practices," is no longer tenable.[125] Rather, the syncretic nature of these mutual aid and burial societies corresponds to a key characteristic of the Atlantic zone, a space marked by inter- and extra-African cultural and religious mixtures to which not only Arab-Islamic but also European-Christian (predominantly Iberian-Catholic) elements contributed substantially.

It is also important to correct the assumption that Rara is an "anti-Christian" festival. While I do not want to deny that aggressive missionary policies may have induced a tendency among Rara participants to oppose the orthodoxy of Church leaders such as Bishop François Marie Kersuzan and his 1896 "crusade" against Haiti's "despicable African paganism," it should be stressed that Rara's roots are firmly embedded in Afro-Catholic traditions.[126]

CONCLUSION

This article presented a new perspective on Haitian Rara by studying the tradition in connection to Afro-Catholic brotherhoods. It argued that the festival's roots are embedded in pre-Tridentine Iberian Lenten traditions that were reinterpreted from an African perspective before reaching the Caribbean. While further transformation occurred in Saint-Domingue under the influence of French Catholicism, Vodou, and indigenous African (Yoruba, Ewe, Fon, for example) cultures, a comparative analysis revealed that elements rooted in Afro-Iberian brotherhood traditions are clearly evident in the structure and rendition of Rara.

This interpretation strengthens theories put forth by Thornton and others, who have advocated for a different understanding of the role of Christianity in Vodou by insisting on the importance of Catholicism (in African variants) to

124. McAllister, *Rara!*, 148.

125. Herskovits, *Life in a Haitian Valley*, 257.

126. Quoted in William Smarth, *Histoire de l'Église Catholique d'Haïti 1492–2003: Des points de repère*, 2 vols. (Port-au-Prince: CIFOR, 2015), 1:311.

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the Kongolese community. However, the prestige of Bisago societies in Haiti, their similarities to Cape Verdean tabancas, and the astonishing parallels between Rara and Holy Week festivities in São Tomé raise questions about the focus of these scholars on Kongo. These parallels give credit to Joseph Miller's thesis that the impact of the Kongo community on Black religious and cultural identity formation in the American diaspora should be studied in connection to that of "predecessors . . . from backgrounds in slavery in late medieval Iberia."[127]

The new interpretation of Rara's origins presented in this article also suggests that Kevin Dawson's appeal in his 2018 reflections on "slave culture" to "begin the study of the Modern African Diaspora in Africa" may, in some cases, benefit from a closer look at early modern Iberia before turning one's attention to Africa.[128] The importance of understanding Afro-Catholic cultural traditions in the Americas as a process that initiated in the Iberian Peninsula and further evolved in Africa before reaching the New World can be illustrated with the case of the bonfires of the São João (St. John) Festival in Bahia, Brazil. In his fascinating discussion with J. Lorand Matory in *The Americas* (2015), Luís Nicolau Parés characterized these bonfires as "rituals clearly elaborated in Brazil" in the sense that they reflected "the interpenetration of African practices with Catholic or Iberian traditions."[129] As early as 1592, however, we find complaints of Church authorities in Cape Verde about "great abuses" during "St. John festivities"; to this day, those festivities involve bonfires.[130] Similar traditions thrived in seventeenth-century Kongo, where the Capuchin Andrea da Pavia observed a "great celebration with fires and other demonstrations" on "St. John's Eve," which raises questions about the assumption that Bahia's syncretic bonfire rituals developed in Brazil.[131] Rather, this example confirms Cécile Fromont's observation that festive traditions rooted in African interpretations of early modern Iberian customs can "easily be misinterpreted in the Americas as new, Creole syncretisms.'"[132]

The parallels among Iberia, Cape Verde, Kongo, and Brazil in the way people celebrated St. John also challenge us to rethink Joseph Miller's statement that

127. Joseph C. Miller, "Central Africans during the Era of the Slave Trade, c. 1490s-1850s," in *Central Africans and Cultural Transformations in America*, Linda M. Heywood, ed. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), 61.

128. Kevin Dawson, "Slave Culture," in *The Oxford Handbook of Slavery in the Americas*, Mark M. Smith and Robert L. Paquette, eds. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010), 18.

129. Luís Nicolau Parés, "Reply to the Review of J. Lorand Matory," *The Americas* 72:4 (October 2015), 630.

130. Christiano José de Senna Barcellos, *Subsídios para a história da Guiné e Cabo Verde*, 7 vols. (Lisbon: Typographia da Academia Real das Ciências de Lisboa, 1899-1913), 1:172–173.

131. Jadin, "Voyages apostoliques," 448.

132. Cécile Fromont, ed., *Afro-Catholic Festivals in the Americas: Performance, Representation, and the Making of Black Atlantic Tradition* (University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press, 2019), 10.

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"the first slaves to reach Brazil had only Africa on which to draw."[133] In spite of the enormous geographical distance and ethnic differences between the population of seventeenth-century Cape Verde and Kongo, we observe remarkable similarities in the way they organized themselves in confraternities, prayed for the souls of their ancestors, paraded with banners, music, and dance in processions, and made vows to saints.

The fact that virtually all sources on these practices are the work of European missionaries and administrators may have enhanced this perception. These men wrote about what they were familiar with and tended to reject the unknown as superstition, idolatry, or what the Portuguese called *feitiçaria*. Had these sources been written by Africans, they would likely have focused more strongly on elements rooted in the indigenous traditions they were familiar with. It may thus well be that, deep down, indigenous beliefs and cosmologies determined more strongly how African communities adopted Iberian traditions. Even if this were the case, the fact that these African communities shared a number of Iberian structural elements is of high importance in the context of the transatlantic slave trade, where people were snatched away from their familiar surroundings and forced to readjust to a new life in a profoundly intimidating environment. Upon arrival, they did not have just Africa on which to draw; rather, they could also draw on their shared familiarity with certain Iberian practices.

In his 2014 reflections on reimagining the African-Atlantic archive, James Sweet expressed reserve about theories that "European lifeways acted as fundamentally formative for those who would become enslaved" and cautioned against a neo-imperialist tendency to "exaggerate European impacts in Africa." While this concern is legitimate, Sweet's suggestion that a critical analysis of "European sources relating to slaving and slaves" from "an African lens" leads to different conclusions is reductive, since it fails to provide a definition of the complex term "African."[134] Considering that we find references to it going back to 1592, one wonders whether the previously mentioned Cape-Verdean variant of what were originally Iberian St. John rituals can and should be classified as less African than, for instance, the *calundú* healing rituals Sweet highlighted in his article. This question is all the more pertinent considering that sources from the early 1700s reveal that the same Angolans who were involved in singing and dancing the *calundú* in Brazil also turned to Catholic saints for

133. Joseph C. Miller, "Retention, Reinvention, and Remembering: Restoring Identities through Enslavement in Africa and under Slavery in Brazil," in *Enslaving Connections: Changing Cultures of Africa and Brazil during the Era of Slavery*, José C. Curto and Paul E. Lovejoy, eds. (Amherst, NY: Humanity Books, 2004), 111.

134. James H. Sweet, "Reimagining the African-Atlantic Archive: Method, Concept, Epistemology, Ontology," *Journal of African History* 55:2 (2014): 148–149.

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help.[135] The same question applies to the variant of Catholicism that developed in Kongo. Since the king of Kongo converted before Columbus started his first voyage to America, it is legitimate, as Herman Bennett did, to argue that Catholicism in Central Africa over time "transformed into an indigenous phenomenon."[136]

There can be no doubt, however, that the study of the historical evolution of Afro-Iberian beliefs and rituals in the Americas also requires close attention to the cultural and religious influence of those originating from parts of Africa where the Portuguese influence had been insignificant or inexistent. While this article provided new answers to a number of enigmatic questions about Afro-Haitian cultural identity formation, its findings also call for further research on the circumstances in which the transformative convergence of Afro-Iberian traditions with those of other African communities in Saint-Domingue took place. The question of which other African traditions resonated with Afro-Iberian traditions, and why, allows a parallel to Diane Stewart's study on the presence of Catholic saints in Shango communities on the island of Trinidad. Stewart rejected claims that the former served merely as a smoke screen behind which West-African devotees secretly worshipped Yoruba saints and argued instead that they built on antecedents established by Afro-Catholics. According to Stewart, "Afro-Catholics provided the ritual architecture that allowed Yoruba sacred traditions the necessary institutional space to manifest and blossom into a nationally recognized religion."[137] In this respect, Sweet's appeal for a "serious engagement with African histories and ethnographic ways of being" to achieve a "balanced historical rendering of the 'Atlantic'" remains valid, albeit with the reservation that Catholicism too is an African religion and that it was perceived as such by a significant percentage of the Black population in the Americas.[138]

As Matt Childs has argued, the assumption that "Catholicism represents continuity rather than a rupture in African culture" represents an important new development in the study of American "slave culture," which he connected with "religious lay brotherhoods."[139] Truth obliges us, however, to admit that several decades before such ideas appeared in North American scholarship,

135. Michael Iyanaga, "Why Saints Love Samba: A Historical Perspective on Black Agency and the Rearticulation of Catholicism in Bahia, Brazil," *Black Music Research Journal* 35:1 (Spring 2015): 131.

136. Herman L. Bennett, *African Kings and Black Slaves: Sovereignty and Dispossession in the Early Modern Atlantic* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2019), 4.

137. Dianne M. Stewart, "The Orisa House That Afro-Catholics Built: Africana Antecedents to Yoruba Religious Formation in Trinidad," in *Afro-Catholic Festivals in the Americas*, 153.

138. Sweet, "Reimagining the African-Atlantic Archive," 159.

139. Matt D. Childs, "Slave Culture," in *The Routledge History of Slavery*, Gad Heuman and Trevor Burnard, eds. (London: Routledge, 2011), 176.

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Latin American scholars such as Arthur Ramos had noted that certain Catholic customs of Brazil's Black population "came directly from Kongo," and Mário de Andrade had made the point that Afro-Catholic congado performances "were brought to us directly from Kongo."[140]

Perhaps the most important contribution of this essay lies in its emphasis that mutual aid and burial societies modeled on Afro-Iberian brotherhoods are important not only to our understanding of Black cultural and religious identity formation in Latin American societies, but also to how we understand that identity formation in formerly French, Dutch, Danish, and English colonies.

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140. Arthur Ramos, *A aculturação negra no Brasil* (São Paulo: Companhia Editora Nacional, 1942), 273; Mário de Andrade, *Obras completas de Mário de Andrade: Danças dramáticas do Brasil*, Oneyda Alvarenga, ed., 3 vols. (São Paulo: Martins, [1934] 1959), 2:38.

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