

BRAZIL'S BLACK MECCA

Race, Justice, and Entanglements of Tradition in Bahia

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In Light of Africa: Globalizing Blackness in Northeast Brazil. By Allan Charles Dawson. Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2014. Pp. viii + 191. \$27.95 paper. ISBN: 9781442626690.

Black Women against the Land Grab: The Fight for Racial Justice in Brazil. By Keisha-Khan Y. Perry. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2013. Pp. xxi + 213. \$25.00 paper. ISBN: 9780816683246.

Sex Tourism in Bahia: Ambiguous Entanglements. By Erica Lorraine Williams. Champaign-Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2013. Pp. ix + 199. \$26.00 paper. ISBN: 9780252079443.

A resident of Salvador, the capital of the northeastern state of Bahia and a city associated closely with Afro-Brazilian tradition and politics, once joked to me about a tourist who, in the midst of frenetic carnival celebrations, exclaimed to a Brazilian nearby, "Wow, this is the best music in the world!" Faced with the outsider's enthusiasm, the reveler responded, "Yeah! It's even the best music right here in Bahia!" Such fulsome exceptionalism is apparent also in Bahian novelist Jorge Amado's description of Salvador as "exalted by Greeks and Trojans . . . capital of all Africa, situated in the east of the world, on the sea lane to the Indies and China, on the meridian of the Caribbean, fat with gold and silver, perfumed with pepper and rosemary, copper-colored, flower of mulattery, port of mystery, beacon of enlightenment."¹ This fantastic, encyclopedic description of the former command center of the Portuguese South Atlantic gestures at Salvador's early modern importance while simulating European chronicles of discovery. Amado thus calls up (and ironizes and even folklorizes) the idioms and glaring contradictions that mark a nodal point whose violent but often beautiful history and expressive culture help explain why Bahia and "Black Rome" have played such an outsized role in social scientific approaches to racial politics, globalization, slavery and freedom, Brazilian nationalism and regional development, new social movements, African Atlantic religion and cultural production, and the commodification of culture and history.

In what follows I discuss certain arguments and implications of three recent ethnographies of different, albeit entwined, aspects of Bahian life put forth by a diverse group of U.S.-based academics. Allan Dawson's *In Light of Africa: Global-*

1. Jorge Amado, *War of the Saints*, trans. Gregory Rabassa (New York: Dial Press, 1993), 4–5.

izing *Blackness in Northeast Brazil* surveys provocatively the spaces between the everyday and the broader political and intellectual valences of a Bahian-based "Africa" and black political identification in Salvador today. In *Black Women against the Land Grab: The Fight for Racial Justice in Brazil*, an ethnography of a remarkable neighborhood movement led by women, Keisha-Khan Perry develops a diasporic and feminist perspective that girds her argument that citizens' agentive ways of being black have been covered up by dominant forms of conceptualizing Afro-Bahian culture and politics. In *Sex Tourism in Bahia: Ambiguous Entanglements*, Erica Williams examines slightly different facets of such contradictions by exploring an array of Bahian actors' means of engaging, and at times redirecting, the desires of international pilgrims who travel to Salvador in search of Afro-Brazilian bodies and culture.

All three ethnographies are impressively researched and generally well-written first books that, in part because they are based on relatively recent dissertations, might be taken as emblematic of shifting tendencies in the Anglophone academy as well as alterations in politics and social life "on the ground." I approach the texts as representative of the ongoing place of Brazil's blackest region in social scientific debates in multiple locations: Salvador and Bahia—the capital city and the state names are often used interchangeably to refer to the modern metropolis—are larger-than-life stages and symbols for the enactment and support of global imaginaries. They are also lived spaces significant to, and inhabited by, millions. The interplay of ambiguously distinct foreign gazes and native practices, diasporic or transnational concerns and neighborhood particularities, and vernacular culture and its representation and mobilization as national or regional culture, girds each of the texts analyzed.

Dawson's *In Light of Africa* moves serially from Salvador's Pelourinho Historical Center and the African immigrants who frequent this UNESCO World Heritage site to the pacts and divergences between the intellectuals who have long sought to describe "Black Rome," to working-class neighborhoods and Evangelical congregations, and then on to the dry backlands of the state of Bahia (the *sertão*). Dawson's account is rooted in historical and anthropological discussions of African survivals and cultural reelaborations in the Americas. These often contentious debates include Melville Herskovits's midcentury focus on continuities of African cultures in the New World; Sidney Mintz and Richard Price's creolization model of cultural transmission whereby the violent intimacy of the slave ship and the plantation created contexts for new, creative and nonetheless "African" cultural forms; and J. Lorand Matory's arguments about the roles of nineteenth-century African travelers in inflecting Brazilian as well as West African ethnicity and nationalism.² Like Jorge Amado's post-World War II version of Bahia, Dawson's portrait of emergent forms of blackness is thus linked historically to the

2. Melville Herskovits, *The Myth of the Negro Past* (New York: Harper, 1941); Sidney Mintz and Richard Price, *An Anthropological Approach to the Afro-American Past: A Caribbean Perspective* (Philadelphia: Institute for the Study of Human Issues, 1976); and J. Lorand Matory, *Black Atlantic Religion: Tradition, Transnationalism, and Matriarchy in the Afro-Brazilian Candomblé* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2005).

Caribbean, the wider Atlantic, and comparative perspectives on cultural change. And yet the Bahia described by Dawson—a keen ethnographer conscious of his situation as yet another, albeit specifically situated, anthropologist washed up on Afro-Brazilian shores—is rather different from a postwar and supposedly “copper-colored” Bahia whose representation has been heavily influenced by Amado and the intellectuals and metropolitan travelers linked to him.

Contemporary Bahia, for Dawson, is steeped instead in spiraling valorizations of Africa that are at times allied with antiracist strategies put together in the wake of Brazil’s 1964–1985 military dictatorship. As Williams writes in *Sex Tourism in Bahia*, “Bahia has become a mecca not only for Afro-Brazilian culture but also for global signifiers of blackness and cultures of Africa” (30). The emphasis on African roots in a Brazil increasingly engaged in multiculturalist reworkings of liberal democratic life thus eclipses the celebrations of a Luso-Afro-Amerindian people found at the core of Amado’s fiction and twentieth-century Brazilian nationalism. According to Dawson, this recent transformation in politics and their historical referents and temporalities turns in great measure on “the ascendance of the Africa-centric movement in the Black neighbourhoods and in the Africanized public image of Bahia” (112). Nonetheless, in an important contribution to debates about antiracist struggle, Dawson argues that certain segments of Bahia’s citizenry question the dominant Black Movement and antiracist symbology even as those citizens recognize Brazilian racism and embrace black identities. In Dawson’s interpretation there are multiple ways of being black and Bahian, and these may have little to do with the collective representations associated in most academic accounts with shifting politics of race in Bahia.

The claim that there are multiple modes of racialization—and thus of understanding what it is to be black, white, or any of the intermediary racial positions so often touted as paradigmatically Brazilian—is not new. Differences between US and Brazilian racial politics that came to light in UNESCO-sponsored studies conducted in Bahia after World War II were influential in Anglophone, Brazilian, and Francophone anthropologists’ late twentieth-century questioning of North American and European racial ideologies, and thus anthropology’s project of deconstructing race as a biological category.³ What is novel is the clarity of Dawson’s ethnographic voice, which suggests that the symbols mobilized today are but one way of responding to ongoing racism. According to Dawson, the Afro-Brazilian religion Candomblé, the dance/martial art *capoeira*, and Salvador’s expressive cultural and neighborhood organizations known as *bloco afros* are not necessarily the most salient marks of identification drawn upon by a citizenry nonetheless invested in being black.

Dawson’s analysis rests on the assertion that most cultural forms are coproduced, often agonistically, by elites and “the people,” states and citizens, and citizens of different races. This pragmatic approach is in his hands both an attempt to deal with data on the ground and a defense of a “real” Africa and the experiences

3. For an overview of the UNESCO race relations project and Brazilian social science, see especially Marcos Chor Maio, “O projeto UNESCO e a agenda das ciências sociais no Brasil dos anos 40 e 50,” *Revista Brasileira de Ciências Sociais* 44 (1999): 141–158.

collected in an array of Bahian locations by an ethnographer dedicated to both sides of the Atlantic. In a move that seems important and yet somehow filled with social scientific hubris, Dawson recounts how Bahians rely on a limited array of tropes to describe a real Africa even as he examines how a diverse group of African culture brokers in Salvador negotiate their identities, and thus their survival, through the marketing of identities and cultural dispositions associated with Africa. The African "ethnic entrepreneurs" and intellectuals depicted by Dawson interact with Bahians, the anthropologist, and tourists in ways that provide the social scientist with an orthogonal light from which to assess the contours of what Dawson dubs the hegemonic discourse on Africa now so much a part of Bahian politics. This ethnography rests also on engagements with people like "Edmar," a *baiana do acarajé*, or member of a guild of iconic and mostly female Afro-Brazilian street vendors who sell fritters (*acarajé*) slathered in okra stew, shrimp, and hot pepper and associated with Afro-Brazilian religion. Edmar's version of Catholicism clashes subtly with the Black Movement emphasis on Africa, leading her to reject "their" ways of being black in favor of the sort of hybrid, or mixed Roman Catholic and "African" or Afro-Brazilian rituals performed in the intercultural masses performed in a number of churches today.⁴ And yet Edmar does not embrace what is often called Brazilian "racial democracy," or an ostensibly non-racialist account of harmonious mixture and cultural borrowing.

Dawson's account is bold, due in no small part to his focus on the limits of the semiotic forms and institutions associated with attempts to mitigate violence and secure civil rights today. Nonetheless, and even while it joins Perry's *Black Women against the Land Grab* in exploring what it means to be black, a diasporic subject, and a citizen (or quasi-citizen) in Bahia, *In Light of Africa* presents a different Salvador than that apparent in Perry's contemporaneous ethnography. Her analysis of a movement directed by women and aimed at protecting coveted seaside lands now occupied by residents of the working-class community of Gamboa de Baixo (located in the shadow of some of Salvador's most valuable real estate) is forged in what she identifies as a diasporic approach influenced by Kamala Visweswaran's conceptualization of "homework" rather than "fieldwork."⁵ For Perry, engagement with the residents of Gamboa congeals as a home in which black peoples separated by national boundaries are connected racially by shared experiences with solidarity, violence, and discrimination. The result of such a diasporic as well as transnational feminist approach is a nuanced optic on racial politics that, like Dawson's analysis, helps move interpretation beyond the hegemonic markers of Bahian blackness commonly celebrated by academics, the state, and activists.

4. John Burdick, "The Catholic Afro Mass and the Dance of Eurocentrism in Brazil," in *Race, Nation and Religion in the Americas*, edited by Henry Goldschmidt and Elizabeth McAlister, 111–130 (New York: Oxford University Press, 2004).

5. Kamala Visweswaran, *Fictions of Feminist Ethnography* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1994). In the diaspora approach drawn on by Perry, "Black and/or Africana Studies is concerned with Black collectivity, Black positioning in relation to power and social hierarchy, and Black agency regardless of national or other boundaries imposed upon us" (Edmund Gordon, "The Austin School Manifesto: An Approach to the Black or African Diaspora," *Cultural Dynamics* 19, no. 1 [2007]: 93).

According to Perry (xix), "It has not been difficult for poor black people in Brazil to decipher who is black. . . . They see and feel race and class structures in their everyday lives. . . . Nor do policy makers, development agents, and the police have much difficulty." The issue at play in struggles for social justice is not which version of blackness or what intermediate color terms are up for grabs as a function of cultural politics, but rather the effects of the ways race has been elided from analyses of land tenure and social exclusion in Brazil: "Scholars [are] fascinated with supposed Brazilian plurality of racial identities when it is not key to how black women in Brazil see themselves" (xvii). One result of this in Salvador is that "black politics are legible only when they take a cultural form" (24). In other words, the Bahian focus on culture—alongside a linked "identity fetishism" (xvii) supported by academics concerned with, for example, blocos afros rather than smaller neighborhood associations—means that black resistance and the importance of black Bahians, especially women, to real change in the public sphere often go unnoticed.

Perry and Dawson challenge commonsense interpretations of canonical representations of blackness in Bahia and the institutional sites with which they are typically associated today. They do so as part of efforts to understand both racism and antriracism. But the two differently situated anthropologists put forth their programs differently: Dawson, whose research takes him away from the hallowed spaces of Salvador's powerful Candomblé temples and capoeira academies, seeks to expand what counts as Afro-Bahian culture and its resignification by the black Bahians for whom those forms fail to reverberate.⁶ He concludes that there exists in Salvador "a true heteroglossia of consciousness" about being black, and he identifies the delineation and articulation of such modalities as a political project (8).

Perry, whose research takes her to Gamboa de Baixo and away from Bahia's famous nongovernmental organizations, claims to eschew a focus on public culture and subjectivity, suggesting instead that a consideration of black women's activism forces the ethnographer to confront both the real structures of exclusion in Bahia (which include the focus on culture to the detriment of women's organizing) and to recognize the extent of black women's agentic interventions. So while Dawson is interested in the politicization of the figure of Africa, and its shape and acceptance or rejection across political and color spectrums, Perry works to uncover how battles for justice by black residents "offer alternative views on how African diasporic communities operate and should operate" (Perry, xvii). Nonetheless, the two might agree that the hegemonic approach to black politics in Bahia "has now come to constrict and curtail the spaces available . . . for innovation, flexibility, alternative identities, and . . . multiplex ideas about Blackness" (Dawson, 13). For Dawson, whose conclusions are influenced by Gramscian approaches to culture and symbolic mediation, this is, again, an issue of culture and

6. See John Collins, "'X Marks the Future of Brazil': Racial Politics, Bedeviling Mixtures and Protestant Ethics in a Brazilian Cultural Heritage Center," in *Off Stage/On Display: Intimacies and Ethnographies in the Age of Public Culture*, ed. Andrew Shryock, 191–224 (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2004).

its alternative expression. For Perry it is about escaping what some analysts dub a "Bahian culturalism."⁷

Perry's ethnography in Gamboa de Baixo is steeped in innovation and flexibility as well as the resistance she observes on the part of residents. Unlike Dawson's multi-sited approach, Perry relies on more intimate, ongoing relationships within the community so as to engage women raising families, making a life, and protecting their homes as Gamboa residents establish political projects as black women in order to challenge a government working to transform the city's downtown into a theme park predicated on the exhibition of Afro-Brazilian culture and the materialization of the sorts of fantasies that Williams ties to Salvador's culture industry in *Sex Tourism in Bahia*. But Perry is little interested in sexual politics. She approaches Salvador's transformation into a tourist hub dependent on Afro-Bahian practices through the lens of "de-Africanization" or a whitening of public space that she traces to early twentieth-century hygienic projects and to midcentury attempts to control prostitutes and women of ostensibly loose morals in the adjoining Pelourinho neighborhood, today's UNESCO world heritage site. Here it is worth noting that Perry draws on generalizing, tertiary and at times unidentified sources to trace a seamless, almost path-dependent arc within which she ties together the diverse Afro-Bahian working-class communities that still pockmark downtown Salvador. In spite of such flattenings of history and occasional misstatements of fact, which transform a complex back and forth between state and citizen in downtown Salvador into too monolithic a linkage of state-directed displacement of women in adjoining neighborhoods to social dynamics from Gamboa, Perry's ethnography offers an often detailed and gripping account of how black women resist by identifying as African people.

Within this war of positions, "African religious traditions" seem "indissociable from black women's political actions in the local, national, and global black struggle for material resources" (157). Recourse to African-derived religiosity, as well as a language of de-Africanization to describe the policing of black citizens and the destructive urbanism so often a part of such a project, underscores the importance of Africa as a place, an identity, a politics, and a productive metaphor. So while Perry joins Dawson in suggesting that political analysis need not rest on the most celebrated symbols of Bahia's black public sphere, she pulls Africa into her conclusions in ways that accord rather closely with its usage by the Black Movement activists whose discourse, Dawson suggests, fails to energize certain important segments of working-class, black Bahia. In Perry's view, cultural forms like Candomblé are basic, shared tools for staking claims to land (156). Critically, however, and in spite of her apparent acceptance of the efficacy of certain canonical symbols of Afro-Brazilianness, Perry denounces the still-common tendency in Salvador to portray instances of black resistance as building blocks of national culture, rather than contestations of a racialized, unequal status quo. In an underscoring of her emphasis on neighborhood politics as crucibles for the production

7. See Michael Hanchard, *Orpheus and Power: The Movimento Negro of Rio de Janeiro and São Paulo, Brazil, 1945–1988* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1994), for a discussion in English of critiques of Bahian culturalism.

of diasporic sensibility, Perry argues that “black women’s morality . . . informed by Christianity and . . . Afro-Brazilian religious traditions . . . encourages them to abandon their special interests and fight on behalf of the entire community” (161). This is a rather specific use of the term “morality” and an equally specific reading of the politics and actions of Christians and Candomblé practitioners. In spite of the symbolic and practical role of African-derived spirituality in black men and women’s empowerment, as well as the fact that Williams makes explicit in *Sex Tourism in Bahia* the importance of African-derived spirituality in her own engagement with Bahia, it is not axiomatic that Afro-Atlantic religiosity always incites a more collective perspective on social struggle in a Brazil in which plays of secrecy, claims to authenticity, and practitioners of multiple African-derived religious traditions (including Pentecostal Protestantism) vie for authority. Yet it often does. And whether or not it does, the term “morality” indexes something else and plays an important role in Perry’s argument.

Perry historicizes the battles over land in and near Gamboa with broad strokes that gloss over nearly a century of struggles to survive and gain rights to the city. In this analysis, worries over women’s morality stand out as tools for erecting barriers to full citizenship and in denigrating women’s organizing. But claims to morality are also significant as resources in black women’s struggles to make sense of and even alter their places in society. As a result, a focus on morality as a generalized condition and as a description wielded by Perry helps make visible forms of solidarity and novel perspectives developed by women who have long survived economically as domestic servants, prostitutes, washerwomen, and street vendors.

For Perry, countering “racial domination means reclaiming collective power through redefining black womanhood. Reconstructing political identities based on their own understanding of themselves as black is a source of empowerment necessary for political action” (79). Here, “diasporic imagination interpellates . . . the contradictions that emerge from the concreteness of participation in the project of modernity by those symbolically and ideologically excluded. . . . It reveals these contradictions through the exposure of the presences of blackness in ‘other places’ when these presences are denied in ‘this place.’”⁸ Thus the diasporic perspective afforded by Perry’s ethnography of not simply social movements, but of everyday life in Gamboa, permits a focus on the materiality of gendered forms of race-based exclusion. It does so in a region in which an emphasis on black culture may have tamped down black political organizing or, at very least, led to its misrecognition as “national culture.”

On the other hand, for Dawson, the revelatory power of diaspora and transnational frames gives rise to a focus on versions of blackness often denigrated as manifestations of “false consciousness” in Bahia and within Brazilian discourse. So while Perry’s work inspires readers to see battles over land as racial wars of position, and to recognize the agentive role of Afro-Bahian women, Dawson encourages social scientists to do the almost unthinkable and approach fer-

8. Jean Rahier and Percy Hintzen, “Theorizing the African Diaspora,” in *Global Circuits of Blackness: Interrogating the African Diaspora* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2010), xviii.

vent Catholics—as opposed to the Candomblé practitioners celebrated in Salvador's racialized commonsense as leaders in the fight against antiracism, or even the Evangelicals who attack Candomblé and its associated symbols as a devil's religion—as black Brazilians who carve out ways of being black without falling into something called false consciousness. And these subject positions, like women's organizing in Gamboa, might someday alter the conditions of possibility for political action, something Williams notes in turn has been the case with the once-denigrated Candomblé and capoeira that do so much to secure an imagined Africa in Salvador today.

Morality, diaspora, and heterogeneity come together somewhat differently in *Sex Tourism in Bahia* as Williams considers why, and for what, people come to Brazil's black mecca. Historically, the ostensible object of attraction for metropolitan travelers—from cruise ship passengers and “roots tourists” to Simone de Beauvoir and Jean-Paul Sartre, Melville Herskovits, Toni Morrison, Hilary Clinton, and Michael Jackson—has been “African (or black) culture.” Yet still-dominant representations of black peoples are often deeply imbricated in claims about sexuality and morality. Hence the overlaps of sexuality, culture, and race in a present characterized by the rampant commodification of the intimate and the objectification of Afro-Bahians' everyday practices lead Williams to focus on “ambiguous entanglements.” These interactions highlight the “difficulty of identifying people's motivations, desires, and intentions in these encounters and relationships that often bridge boundaries of age, race, class, and nationality. Sometimes there are even mixed messages and a lack of clarity between the two people involved” (3–4). *Sex Tourism in Bahia* is thus a study of “mixed messages” that pass between—and join at the hip as well as divide—Afro-Brazilian culture and the sexuality and sexual practices of Salvador's “natives.”

Williams bases her evocative account, one explicitly and especially well situated in Brazilianist as well as Brazilian scholarly production, on interview with tourists, commercial prostitutes, *garotas de programa* (higher-priced prostitutes who typically deny they practice a “profession”), an ambiguous category of tour guide/hustler/friend or lover known locally as a *çaça gringa* (gringa hunter), Afro-Bahian performers who rail against their objectification by foreigners, and health authorities, social workers, and feminist groups. She also engages sex workers' everyday lives through participant observation conducted alongside the advocacy group known as Association of Prostitutes of Bahia (Aprosbá). The anthropologist hands out condoms, hangs out, teaches English, and accompanies these women in their workplaces, where her light-skinned black appearance leads some to confuse Williams and her sex worker interlocutors. While, as wit Dawson's interview-based approach, Williams's depictions of interactions and people could at certain junctures stand more fleshing out in terms of social context, her account raises a number of important issues in relation to Afro-Brazilia and gendered working-class struggle in the borderlands of culture, race, and sexuality.

One of the most interesting aspects of Williams's analysis involves a “morpanic” that construes “women of color as naïve, vulnerable, innocent victims of unscrupulous foreign men” (153). Here a commitment to understanding “ambigu-

ous entanglements” pays off as Williams ties the anti-human trafficking NGO known as the Humanitarian Center for the Support of Women (CHAME) to Bahian class, and thus also race, relations.

Early in her analysis Williams asks, “What role do . . . black Brazilian sex/domestic workers play in constituting the subjectivities of white male foreign tourists?” (115). But she never really responds to this question in depth or directs it in a sustained way at a wider array of men and women that might include Bahians ranging from clients, the (at times abusive) male relatives of domestic workers’ female employers (*patroas*), those employers themselves, and even police or medical personnel.⁹ And yet her interrogation of moral panics opens up the possibility of understanding the construction of difference between the middle-class, whiter, and usually more formally educated women involved in CHAME and the working-class, mainly Afro-Brazilian women they claim to protect. This presents an opportunity for understanding not simply entanglements—a powerful, long-standing trope that, like nationalist descriptions of Afro-Bahian everyday life as Brazilian culture, has long served to veil racism and exploitation in a Brazil misrepresented as a hybrid racial paradise—but the agonistic, interior frontiers and oft-denied racial cleavages so constitutive of Bahia as a land of brutal enchantment. But the moral panics surrounding trafficking provoke Williams to focus instead on how efforts to protect ostensibly vulnerable Afro-Bahian women mesh with what is in effect a curtailing of their freedom to travel. And these strictures mimic and support a whole range of impediments to social justice. This key insight ties rather directly into questions of Afro-Bahian agency, something Williams addresses in relation to sexuality in terms of what might be dubbed a “subaltern cosmopolitanism.” From this standpoint, the ambiguously defined sexual practices worked out between locals and visitors provide working-class Bahians with possibilities for consumption, travel, and social advancement: Sexuality ties into agency not simply in relation to choice, but as a strategic reserve of qualities that might be channeled to secure access to experiences and places typically unavailable to working class Afro-Bahians. As Williams describes, people instrumentalize desire in iconoclastic manners that may blur neat definitions of economy, sexuality, and affect.

Recognition of the extent to which putatively philanthropic efforts may reinscribe power divisions highlights the perspicacity and political import of Williams’s ethnography. However, she fails to push these insights much beyond the important point that “the specter of vulnerability creates a moral panic in which already marginalized people are stigmatized even further” (158). In moving beyond panic as solely discriminatory, a number of social scientists have focused also on philanthropic institutions like CHAME, legal initiatives, and moralizing discourses to demonstrate that sexual matters are of direct and even constitu-

9. For a relational approach to issues of race, sexuality, and morality that arise in the interface between Afro-Brazilian domestic workers and their employers, see especially Donna Goldstein, *Laughter Out of Place: Race, Class, Violence and Sexuality in a Rio Shantytown* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2005).

tive importance to states and colonizing projects.¹⁰ In fact, concerns over proper comportment and their analysis by the experts authorized to judge and instruct citizens have been critical to the construction of sovereignty and the knowledge-producing institutions in Brazil and neighboring republics.¹¹ Left unexplored in Williams' text are the impacts of moral panics on the state and the well-funded and extremely powerful nongovernmental institutions justified around their putatively beneficent concerns with uplift and well-being.

CHAME appears in *Sex Tourism in Bahia* as a well-intentioned disseminator of messages that disempower sex workers and nonelite Bahians in general. In her creative and ethnographically dense chapter 3, "Working Class Kings in Paradise," Williams takes up related issues arising from subjects' attempts to define themselves in opposition to Others constructed through ostensibly intimate or even ameliorative discourses. Her explicit focus in doing so is on the rather direct ways sex tourism functions as a challenge to local social hierarchies as well as one ambiguous and often denigrated path into working-class attempts at social mobility.

Tourism is one of the world's most important industries, and over the last half century authorities have ramped up their marketing of Afro-Brazilian culture. The type of discrimination associated with CHAME "philanthropy," which too often flies under the radar as state and bourgeois protection of the unfortunate, might therefore be followed usefully into the very structure and logics of the Bahian state and associated institutions. In fact, one might trace philanthropic and state concern with trafficking, as Donna Guy argues was the case in belle époque Buenos Aires, to the institutions that police the knowledge claims that ground regional and national solidarity. And one might even entertain the conclusion that state-directed vigilance and elite concerns over Afro-Brazilian sexuality played important roles in the formation of some of the very state institutions—like the Instituto do Patrimônio Artístico e Cultural da Bahia (IPAC) or the Bahian State Tourism Authority (Bahiatursa)—that help conjure the misrepresentations of Afro-Brazilian life that support the confiscation of working-class territory in a Salvador increasingly mobilized around the marketing of culture. Additionally, a consideration of Afro-Bahian agency in the face of government assertions about education and the care of its citizenry might add to Williams's arguments in chapter 6, "Se valorizando (Valuing Oneself)," by demonstrating how frequently and in what ways sexuality becomes, or fails to become, a state concern that citizens might mobilize in putting forth political projects.

While hysteria about human trafficking might be considered in relation to the development and reach of state institutions so as to craft a more complex approach to Afro-Brazilian agency, Williams makes clear that her focus is on Bahia's

10. See for example Ann Stoler, *Carnal Knowledge and Imperial Power: Race and the Intimate in Colonial Rule* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2002).

11. Donna Guy, *Sex and Danger in Buenos Aires* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1991); Margareth Rago, *Os prazeres da noite: Prostituição e códigos da sexualidade feminina em São Paulo (1890–1930)* (Rio de Janeiro: Paz e Terra, 1991).

tourist industry and the ways that sexuality, race, and the market entangle so as to alter the lives of Salvador's Afro-descendent working class. So it may be unfair to expect Williams, or Perry and Dawson, to move in such directions even as the links between state institutions and the firms that oversee the tourist, construction, and culture industries in Bahia are remarkably tight. However, this line of questioning raises another point related to the concerns with outside eyes, social scientific representations, and their effects upon and potential alteration by Afro-Bahians.

A glance at tourist guides, fiction, modern art, and musical production reveals how the sex trade—and neighborhoods like Barra and Pelourinho—play special roles in Salvador's development. Perry touches upon this overlap between bodies, elite attempts to moralize a working-class population, and struggles over urban space in her brief contextualization of Gamboa de Baixo and its female residents in relation to the Pelourinho Historical Center (the adjacent neighborhood and a UNESCO World Heritage site carved out of Salvador's red-light district across recent decades). Here morality stands as a resource for Gamboa residents and a red herring for state officials who would confiscate people's homes. Yet none of the ethnographies under consideration offers a nuanced description of Bahian discourses about gendered forms of propriety—which include moral panics, public as well as private sexual practices, and even the often rueful discussions of sexuality and practitioners' purported homosexuality within Candomblé mentioned by Williams and Dawson—that goes beyond the assertion that black women develop a variety of ethical stances that are important to politics. This is a key point, given the multiple forms of invisibility produced by the negative attention so often directed at black women by authorities, Salvador's bourgeoisie, and a social science that fetishizes Bahian culture while overlooking the politics of women who seek inclusion. And yet, if one commits to making visible the contributions of Afro-Bahians to a political order too often predicated on denying their politics, it would make sense to situate the social interactions examined in a more robust sense of historical unfolding.

If one takes seriously the work of thinkers like Hayden White, for whom histories are nearly always moral narratives of national becoming, then a focus on morality clarifies the extent to which all three ethnographies read as somewhat out of time. By this, I do not mean that the texts lack historical referents or miss the importance of narrating the past. Rather, each researcher describes a series of interactions in varying degrees of specificity, but none provides truly in-depth attention to the historical development of the social relations and institutions examined or the historical situations of the people with whom they interact ethnographically. The effect is often one of ethnographic interlocutors as talking heads who enunciate slightly different takes on racial politics today. One result of such a lack of a careful contextualization that would suture the ethnographic and the historical is that it becomes difficult to assess their varied claims when the books are read alongside one another.

For example, as early as the 1890s black citizens' associations and Bahian carnival groups formed as "African" institutions in contradistinction to more middle-class associations like the "Gentlemen of Malta" and "Sons of Venice."

The self-consciously Afro-Bahian groups boasted names like "African Knights," "Grandsons of Africa," "Defenders of Africa," and the "African Embassy." These political and ludic associations so much a part of a "re-Africanized" late nineteenth-century and early twentieth-century carnival were taken quite seriously by authorities, who banned them from participating from 1905 to 1914.¹² Thus an Africa that waxes and wanes in relation to the projects of a black working class and the bourgeoisie that has traditionally controlled the Bahian state—or agonistic relations of the sort that may help produce and make analytically productive a diasporic blackness shared by Gamboa residents and Perry—is marked by a deep and conflicted history. Yet as suggested above, and as is perhaps necessary given the importance of black peoples' agency and experience in its production, Perry is relatively unclear about such an Africa. She describes its presence and affirms its importance to religion, morality, and politics as waged by black people who face discrimination, but she never indicates whether or how African identity is an origin that lies "out there" in history, an endpoint, a shared symbol forged in struggle, a product of diasporic contacts, or all or none of the above. It may very well be all of the above. And such a claim is an important part of a diasporic perspective in which Africa is seen as put together as a resource forged from shared origins as well as experiences and dialogues in the present that seek to make sense of discrimination based on race. Yet in Perry's account there is little conceptual clarity about the different levels or valences of this process. Instead, spirituality, water, family, morality, and African-derived religiosity mesh quickly and at different moments in ways that are not always tied to the evidence that supports the social interactions that compose this identity—or perhaps this Africa—as a political resource. Additionally, and even given the substantial space that Dawson dedicates to debates across the Black Atlantic, a sense of this (or any) Africa's actual unfolding across the Bahian *longue durée* (which Dawson takes as a verifiable historical process rather than a dialogical, "presentist," inflection of surrounding ideologies) does not really emerge in his account of epochal rupture and diverse responses to the heteroglossia of an invented Africa.

Instead, Dawson informs readers simply that for the "members of Afro-Brazilian religious congregations, Blackness . . . must come to mean more than just an awareness of African descent" (8). He documents in fascinating detail—as exemplified by his discussion of two different words for "black," the color term *preto* and the ethnic category *negro* (108)—something of the substance of the histories at play. In this way history, tradition, and descent mesh, or fail to mesh, in Dawson's argument in relation to a historical figure called "Africa" that the anthropologist has visited, that most Bahians engage as part of Black Movement discourse, and that many Bahians reject as the source of their politicized identities. But if we take a cue from the African diasporic perspective drawn on by Perry, and the realization that history is not simply that which took place (or the "content" of narratives about the past), then a historicized account of how one faces the past and situates oneself in historical flows that produce the shifting

12. See Kim D. Butler, "Africa in the Reinvention of Nineteenth Century Afro-Bahian Identity," *Slavery and Abolition* 22, no. 1 (2001): 135–154.

saliency of such an Africa is key to who one understands oneself and others to be, and thus to political change.

Ethnographers working in as self-consciously and violently historicized a space as Afro-Bahia are well placed to begin to tease out how people face history and tradition, and why it matters. As Perry puts it, "History as an interpretive tool of collective defiance, empowerment, and solidarity contests racial hegemony and reinscribes black communities on the coastal lands" (74). Yet Perry works on a rather structural or spatial plane to affirm the value of history without really engaging evidence and demonstrating its production, or her own and her research subjects' imbrication in that history. Her account simply affirms history's importance to struggle. In a somewhat similar manner, Williams treats history, especially as narrated through the debates about race whose attachment to sexuality she so successfully documents, as but a context or background to ethnography. Instead of tying race and sexuality together in Salvador, she builds her ethnography of sex tourism atop an extraordinarily well-wrought account of Brazilian racial democracy. I recommend this section, especially, to anyone interested in a detailed but concise and sophisticated gloss of Brazilian "non-racialism." But Williams offers little institutional or ethnographic context from which to understand the details of the overlaps, or historical entanglements, of race and sexuality in the making of the physical and institutional landscapes in which she conducts her ethnography.

While I am not suggesting that anthropologists must jam into their ethnographies a detailed narrative of what has happened across the oceans for centuries, or even decades, the insightful analyses examined here do suggest the importance of more nuanced accounts of how the representations and even interpretive conventions—race is, after all, a category dependent on people's perceptions of evidence, however spurious or convincing those may seem—on which we rely as citizens and social scientists have come into place, and how people and institutions navigate these processes. Given the extent to which both Perry and Dawson write in opposition to a symbolic pantheon of Afro-Brazilianness actively managed by elites and the state, and coproduced by working people, this seems an important project. And on one level, it is precisely what Dawson attempts in parsing academic debates over African survivals and creolization in order to argue that today's discourse of Afro-Bahian tradition is a co-production by social scientists, religious practitioners, African travelers, and citizens. Nonetheless, and even when he notes, for example, how much social scientific claims resonate with "everyday" Bahians (89), what resonates as history throughout *In Light of Africa* are names, dates, concepts, and thus the contents of accounts of the Black Atlantic and its constructed African character. And yet, and especially if one takes seriously the diasporic and transnational, postcolonial feminist approaches mobilized by Perry, and to a lesser extent by Williams, then it is precisely the positionality of researchers and the materiality of their claims to knowledge and history that support attempts to identify exclusion and sustain Afro-Brazilians' struggles. After all, history is not simply an untheorized description of what happened. Nor is it a concatenation of concerns in the present worked out in experiences that are separate from the processes described, and thus but an invention by those authorized

in the present to talk about the past. And such a presentist historical perspective is one of Dawson's most basic starting points, one that he addresses and in effect counters most forcefully by looking at the "real" content or meanings of people's statements rather than their enunciation and pragmatic force. In the face of such a tendency, and as ongoing debates over the history of culture change resonate across the Black Atlantic to impact who Bahians are and what they can do, and claims about Afro-Bahian morality infect and even justify everything from inequitable land tenure to police violence, it would seem important to develop more nuanced approaches to knowing, and living in, what has happened—and failed to happen—so that we might work to enact more just futures.

Such an ethnographic project might attend in detail to the cues, idioms, semi-otic alignments, and ways of gathering evidence and producing truths about the past that are significant in the social contexts examined and imagined to emanate from such pasts. This is not an approach apparent in the works under consideration, texts whose authors frequently accept that words mean what they appear to mean and people intend to say what they appear to say even as their anthropological attention to such meaning promises to uncover alternative politics. So, for example, in Dawson's hands an interlocutor's claim that she disavows Africa as the source of her politics is taken as a commentary on today's Bahia and the Black Movement's use of African symbols, or evidence about debates about creolization and African survivals, rather than one aspect of the centuries of often agonistic engagements with Africa on the part of working-class Brazilians.¹³ At various moments in his text it appears that Dawson is patently aware of the historical and geographical variability of citizens' claims to, or denials of, Africa. But I found no detailed engagement with the variable social ontologies integral to a longer history of "Africa" that would provide the detailed, contextualized analysis necessary for its consideration. *In Light of Africa* offers instead a rather beautiful and most insightful overview of academic contests over creolization that the ethnographer then ties, usually convincingly, to contemporary Bahians' apparent reverence for foreign experts, whether North American academics or African travelers. Whether the inability to tie academic debates more forcefully to a more detailed lived history in Bahia is a conceptual oversight related to the assumption that history is what happened, or the result of the exigencies of academic publishers who discourage larger, denser analyses, I do not know.

In conclusion, increasingly sophisticated means of approaching the tensions between what really happened, what is said to have happened, and the methods through which researchers and citizens agree or disagree in making sense of that relationship are essential, especially in light of concerns with Afro-Brazilian agency. This seems especially true in the context of the ethnography of a place called Afro-Bahia that shimmers, confusingly, like a "port of mystery" as well as a "beacon of enlightenment" situated "in the east of the world, on the sea lane to the Indies and China, on the meridian of the Caribbean." As illustrated by Jorge

13. Hebe Mattos, *Das cores do silêncio* (Rio de Janeiro: Arquivo Nacional, 1998); and Marta Abreu and Hebe Mattos, "'Remanescentes das comunidades dos quilombos': Memória do cativo, patrimônio cultural e direito à reparação," *Revista Iberoamericana* 42 (2011): 147–160.

Amado's baroque prose, such oppositions or contradictions may have been muted at certain moments by means of a playful but ultimately violent engagement with a hybridity taken as a sign of the ostensible absence of racial divisions among a Brazilian people presented as black (but not necessarily African) and folkloric. But that moment has passed, or has been taken away (depending on one's view of historical agency). Afro-Bahians increasingly understand mixture and hybridity as aspects of their disempowerment, even as they may mix and match in setting up claims about purity. Social scientists in today's environment might thus work ever more creatively to focus on those forces that constitute shifting, albeit patterned, constellations of blind spots that bedevil us all in different ways. And in different ways, Dawson's, Perry's, and Williams's works push toward this goal, even if they cannot resolve the contradictions and injustices still so much a part of African Brazil and liberal democratic belonging. But it is perhaps this diversity of methods, and conclusions, that provides hope for people whose representation as a beautiful amalgam of cultural and racial forces has somehow given rise today to engagements with Afro-Bahian culture that too often open people to marketing and dispossession, rather than the commitment to consciousness and self-possession that motivates these three newest works in a long line of foreign representations of a beautiful, contradictory, and still unjust Bahia.