

**White Skin, Black Masks:
Brazilian Performances of Africanness in the South Atlantic**

Jerry Dávila

Antonio Tavares was dead. Perhaps it was the Orixá's revenge for the slave trade. The Brazilian embassy in Lagos' messengers cleaned the blood-spattered floor of the stairwell after the chief of the Brazilian mission fell from the embassy's third floor offices.ⁱ He died in September, 1963, a year after he arrived to open the new Brazilian embassy in Lagos. A "Tribute to Carlos Tavares" in the *Nigerian Monday Post* eulogized "Mr. Tavares, popularly known in Brazil as the 'lover of the African race,' being enthusiastic about Africa requested to be transferred to Nigeria."ⁱⁱ At 32, Tavares was the youngest chief of mission in Lagos. He went to Nigeria to open the embassy and prepare it for the arrival of an ambassador, as part of the Brazilian campaign to establish a presence in West Africa. He was not the first to die.

Seven months earlier, Brazil's first ambassador designated to Nigeria, Luiz de Souza Bandeira, died of a heart attack at his residence, a room in the Federal Palace hotel. He had been in Nigeria for only two weeks. With Souza Bandeira's arrival, Tavares requested his transfer back to Brazil.ⁱⁱⁱ Instead, he found himself with the grim task of finding a coffin large enough for the heavy-set ambassador's body. There were simply no coffins that fit the ambassador to be found in Lagos funeral homes and Tavares despaired of removing the body from the "dantesque" morgue. In the end, the U.S. embassy gave him an extra-large coffin from its supply.^{iv}

Was the mission cursed? The first Brazilian ambassador to survive his posting to Lagos raised this question in his final report. José Osvaldo Meira Penna (1963-65) related the embassy's misfortunes to the Foreign Minister: "In fewer than three years, we have had three deaths, a child run over, a cook poisoned to death, a grave illness, embezzlement of funds, four fights and the violation of a minor."^v The ambassador was precise about the nature of that luck: it was "A malediction of the Yoruban *orixás* [spirit gods] that are avenging the sad fate of their bygone devotees, carried by the millions to Bahia in the holds of slave ships, casting over this office what is called *jújú*. What we call *urucubaca* [cursed fortune], a term however that does not etymologically seem to be *nagô* [Yoruba], but *bantú*."^{vi}

Meira Penna's interpretations of the misadventures experienced by Brazil's first diplomats in Nigeria frame two distinct ways of relating to Africa. First, when he described it as

a “white man’s grave,” he employed European colonial discourse. Writing at nearly the same time as Meira Penna, Philip Curtin explained “there is a ‘black legend’ about the climate of tropical countries, that lives on... it is usually elaborated with such elements as ‘primitive tribes,’ burning heat, fever-laden swamps... Above all, West Africa is thought of as a place where white men cannot work. Only Africans can work there, and Europeans ‘go out’ for brief periods at considerable risk to their lives.”^{vii} In fact, in his reports and recollections, Meira Penna frequently invoked climatological interpretations of Nigeria and Brazil. But Meira Penna pivoted from this “European” reading of these misadventures to an “Afro Brazilian” one, emphasizing that the difficulties could not be attributed to climate. Alongside the “white man’s grave,” on the same pages, he characterized the curse in the language of Afro-Brazilian spiritism and even asserted mastery of it by examining the semantics of the word *urucubaca*.

Meira Penna captured a basic element of Brazilian national identity: that ethnicity and race are shared characteristics. This means that racial and ethnic identities are available and employed interchangeably, so Meira Penna could simultaneously interpret Tavares’ death through the European lens of the “white man’s burden” and through the “Afro-Brazilian lens of ‘jujú.’” The Brazilians who travelled to Nigeria in the years immediately following its independence were predominantly white, and they often embraced Afro-Brazilian culture to a much greater extent than did Meira Penna. And to varying degrees, they all shared a sense that because they were Brazilian, regardless of the color of their skin, they were African.

The title here is a play on the title of Martinican psychologist and philosopher Frantz Fanon’s *Black Skin, White Masks* (1952, 1967). Fanon explored the anxiety and alienation produced by identities imposed upon blacks by whites. These pages explore the opposite: the freedom white Brazilians felt to imagine and explore their blackness and Africanness. This white embrace of blackness meant that Brazilians posted by their government to Nigeria could imagine and present themselves as Africans, which in turn allowed them to reconcile their recognition of racial inequalities in Brazil with their belief that Brazil was a racial democracy. The idea of racial democracy encompasses a system of beliefs about the uniqueness of Brazilian cultural and racial mixture, benign social relations and inter-racial intimacy. During the middle decades of the twentieth century, racial democracy also became a state doctrine for projecting a positive national identity, both within Brazil and abroad. While the idea is most often associated with writer Gilberto Freyre, this study does not focus on his considerable influence. Instead, it

looks at the ways a generation of diplomats and intellectuals both carried out the official exercise of portraying Brazil as a racial democracy and how they embraced this belief as part of a complex of identity in which race and ethnicity were embraced as shared national characteristics.

This text explores early Brazilian encounters with independent Nigeria, focusing on the experiences of writers Zora Seljan Braga, Antonio Olinto, diplomat Osvaldo Meira Penna and Olympic athlete Adhemar Ferreira da Silva, all posted to Lagos between 1962 and 1967. They all took part in the campaign to build ties with independent African countries that was begun by President Jânio Quadros (1961) as part of his “Independent Foreign Policy,” continued by João Goulart (1961-64). It draws on the records of Itamaraty (the name given to the Brazilian Foreign Ministry), Nigerian newspapers, memoirs and interviews of diplomats whose job in Lagos was to promote Brazil as a racial democracy that was partially African and culturally similar to Nigeria. The documentation they generated while representing Brazil, their interpretations of the connection between Brazil and West Africa, and their narratives about going to Nigeria, demonstrate the state project to represent Brazil as a racial democracy.

These sources also reveal a web of personal beliefs about Brazilian racial identity. The reflections of these diplomats show a belief in racial democracy alongside a recognition of Brazil’s racial inequalities. They balanced the seeming contradiction between their embrace of racial values and their understanding of the structures of inequality because they believed that all Brazilians, regardless of their background, shared an African heritage. In other words, without ignoring the reality of discrimination in Brazil, they believed that a black, African, presence saturated Brazilian culture and shaped all Brazilians. They were part of a broad intellectual movement in mid-twentieth century Brazil. As Roger Bastide observed, “it was as if Brazil, in the grips of the ‘modernist’ literary movements that had sought to discover Brazil’s originality and cut the European umbilical cord, suddenly gained a consciousness of the value of cultural traits that had come from Africa.”^{viii}

In part, this idea of heritage came from reading Gilberto Freyre, Arthur Ramos and Raimundo Nina Rodrigues. And in part, it came from connections with Candomblé in Bahia, where black religious leaders connected to Nigeria in the early part of the twentieth century projected their rituals as authentically African. According to Góis Dantas, “if the celebration of black culture was used to project a national culture, the glorification of Africans, particularly of the *nagô*, defined regional difference, because it was the Northeast, particularly in Bahia, where

africanisms were believed to have been preserved with greater fidelity.”^x This “authenticity” was especially appealing to modernist artists and intellectuals, like Seljan and Olinto, who invested in identifying and promoting national roots to Brazilian culture -- and in their understanding, ‘national’ meant ‘African.’ Because they believed Brazil was African, in Africa they found Brazil.

The reflections on identity by Brazilian diplomats in Lagos were perfectly reflected by a piece of Brazilian propaganda published in Abidjan, Ivory Coast in 1972, which declared that Brazil was “a country of Africans of every color.”^x The exception to this discourse in Nigeria was Adhemar Ferreira, the only black Brazilian posted to Lagos. An Olympic medalist, Adhemar was greeted as a hero and as a model for Nigerians to aspire to. As it did for Souza Dantas in Ghana, being in Nigeria made Adhemar feel like a Brazilian, not an African. The experiences discussed here were sojourns, brief periods, in which Brazilians reflected revealingly on the syntax of Brazilian national identity.

Balancing Racial Democracy and Racial Inequality

The Brazilians who travelled to Nigeria all recognized the system of values and the structure of hierarchies in Brazil, though in their imagination of Brazil these two realities could coexist. *Because* white Brazilians like the ones discussed here believe that they *were* Africans *as* Brazilians, they could balance their faith in Brazil’s unique racial democracy with their recognition of widespread inequality.

When Antonio Olinto returned from Nigeria in 1964, he published *Brasileiros na África*, an account both of the ethnic community comprised of descendants of Brazilian slaves and of the experiences he and his wife Zora Seljan had during their two years at the Brazilian embassy in Lagos. Olinto, who described himself as being “inside of black culture,” ended the book with an appendix entitled “Racial Prejudice” in which he explains: “When I speak of racial prejudice in this book, I assert that no such thing exists in Brazil. It is essential to precisely explain what this means. Brazilians know no racial prejudice and do not allow segregation.” Olinto leaps from this seemingly unambiguous declaration into a nuanced discussion of racial inequality:

Is this true? Generally, yes. But having inherited the Portuguese spirit of paternalism - which is an asset in interacting with people of any race - we also bear that fatherly or superior attitude that regards those who are lower on the social ladder that is a

disadvantage when it comes to accepting that everyone is truly and effectively equal. This is particularly the case among Brazil's middle class, which comes from the old rural world. If we aren't racially prejudiced, per say, we do display a social conscience that does not always accept colored men. The truth is that black Brazilians started with nothing. May 13, 1888 brought emancipation. Great. Anything else? No... blacks went on being marginalized, to the point of reaching positions of prominence in our twentieth century society only as exceptions. This is a mistake that excludes more than twenty million people from the broader endeavors of Brazil. Among the many reforms that the 1960s herald, we must also change the way we confront the problem of Brazilians of color. The Afonso Arinos Law is good, but it is not enough. We must eliminate the causes that make it necessary.^{xxi}

Though most Brazilians of color were already free by emancipation, characterizing 1888 as the beginning of their freedom frames the question of racial inequality as simply a lag that would be overcome through time, by contrast to a society like the United States, where segregation seemed part of its essence.

Zora Seljan, too, wrote a book about her experiences in Lagos and in it also captured the disconnect between the values of racial democracy and her experience with the lack of vertical racial integration in Brazil. The book was entitled *No Brasil, ainda tem gente da minha cor?* ("In Brazil, are there still people of my color?"). Seljan took as a title a question asked by Romana da Conceição, a Brazilian-born descendant of slaves whose family had resettled in Lagos. According to Olinto, Conceição asked this question because the Brazilian embassy "only had whites" on its staff. Seljan replied "there are still many, thank God, there are many." Yet in the book, Seljan expressed pride in "our anti-racist policies, and of our capacity for commingling and solidarity."^{xxii}

The reflections of Brazilians traveling to Nigeria encompassed both an expansive sense of Brazilian identity, as well as an understanding of the narrowness of Brazil's racial hierarchy. The white Brazilians traveling to Nigeria exemplified the plurality of Brazilian identity which allowed them to simultaneously be African, Portuguese or almost any other Brazilian ethnic group. This flexibility was a form of white privilege: not all Brazilians shared equally in the possession of the country's multiple ethnicities. Jeffrey Lesser has shown the limitations imposed on the identity of Brazilians of Japanese descent.^{xxiii} Meanwhile, prominent intellectuals like Gilberto Freyre howled when black Brazilians embraced their Africanness or blackness over their Brazilianness. The few Brazilians of color traveling to Nigeria were sent as tokens of that

exemplified Brazil's national Africanness and the harmony of its racial relations, reflecting on the country that sent them.

In the mid-twentieth century, Brazilians of color occupied almost no positions of political or economic authority, despite their demographic weight and the growing significance "Afro" in the national and international imagination of "Brazilian." Adhemar Ferreira da Silva was sent as cultural attaché in 1964 because of Antonio Olinto's personal request to President João Goulart. He went with no diplomatic experience, little support from Itamaraty, and when his tour ended, he was never asked to represent Brazil abroad again. Artists and soccer players of color were sent on cultural tours because Itamaraty believed they showed Brazil in the best possible light to West Africans. No Brazilian of color chose to go to Africa: they were chosen to go. By contrast, Antonio Olinto and Zora Seljan went out of a sense of vocation, and for Meira Penna, it was an opportunity for a first ambassadorship.

Nigeria was a place where Brazilians went temporarily and reflected on Brazil, and this reflection focused heavily on Brazilian race mixture, the idea of racial democracy and the sense of an African heritage shared by all Brazilians. What is more, in the presence of ethnic Brazilian communities in Nigeria and other parts of West Africa, these Brazilians found evidence that Brazil and Africa were the same thing: that Brazil was African and that Africa was Brazilian. For Olinto, the idea that West Africa was Brazilian was evident through encounters with the ethnic Brazilian populations along the West African coast. Perhaps as many as 8,000 free and freed Brazilians of color, some of them African-born, resettled in West Africa during the nineteenth century, where they were known as "agudás."^{xiv} Lisa Lindsay explains "the returnees were primarily identified as Africans before they left Brazil, yet they came to West Africa as Brazilians and Westerners and their hybridity gave them certain economic, social and political advantages."^{xv} They brought construction techniques, commercial contacts and religious and cultural practices that distinguished them and which helped maintain connections in Brazil. Through the nineteenth and early twentieth century, Brazilian African and Afro-Brazilian travelers maintained the exchange of goods and cultures between West Africa and Northeastern Brazil. For Brazilians interested in Africa's legacies in Brazil, traveling to Nigeria and being greeted by "Brazilians" bearing many of the customs that captivated them about Afro-Brazilian culture, emphasized their sense of a natural connection between the two sides of the Atlantic.

Contacts between West Africa (particularly Lagos) and Brazil (particularly Salvador) through the nineteenth and early twentieth century helped sustain the Afro-Brazilian religion of Candomblé as an “authentic” African space in Brazil. The leaders of the Candomblé terreiro Ilê Axé Opô Afonjá employed these connections with Africa with particular effectiveness in order to craft it into the “headquarters of Bahian African purism,” by adapting its rituals under the influence of Yoruban cultural nationalism in West Africa.^{xvi} West Africans that responded to British colonial rule by accentuating ‘purity’ and ‘authenticity’ created practices that were exported and reinvigorated Afro-Brazilian religious space in Bahia. It was this ‘authentic’ space in Bahia which in turn inspired Zora Seljan and Antonio Olinto to travel to Nigeria when the opportunity arose after its independence from Britain in 1960.^{xvii} Participation in this and other Candomblé sites endowed white Brazilians like Olinto and Seljan with a sense of Africanness. Peter Fry discussed this phenomenon with regard to Roger Bastide, who transitioned from scholar of Candomblé to initiate: “initiation in *nagô* Candomblé confers African *status*... there is a selective affinity between *nagô* Candomblé and intellectuals...”^{xviii}

Beginning in the 1930s, the ‘authenticity,’ ‘purity,’ and ‘hierarchy’ in Candomblé made it increasingly sought out by white intellectuals and artists, as Beatriz Góis Dantas and Roberto Motta have discussed.^{xix} Mãe Aninha and her successor, Mãe Senhora, cultivated these contacts, gradually transforming Opô Afonjá into the main point of contact between Candomblé and white Brazilian avant-garde artists and scholars. In the 1940s, Pierre Verger, Edison Carneiro, Roger Bastide and others conducted ethnographic research at the terreiro. Verger was initiated as a *babalaô* (cowrie shell diviner) at Opô Afonjá, a role that facilitated his movements between Bahia and West Africa to document religious and cultural connections between the two sides of the Atlantic. Verger was a conduit not only between Bahia and Africa, but between Opô Afonjá and white Brazilian artists intellectuals like writers Jorge Amado and Zelia Gattai, pasticc artist Caribé, as well as Zora Seljan and Antonio Olinto.

Modernist playwright Zora Seljan Braga became interested in Candomblé after she travelled as a tourist to Salvador in the early 1950s, and Verger took her to Opô Afonjá. “Zora went and became enraptured by Mãe Senhora,” Antonio Olinto recalled.^{xx} She returned to Rio de Janeiro, convinced that Candomblé reflected Brazil’s authentic cultural roots and committed to incorporating West African mythology into the construction of a national Brazilian theater culture. Based on her studies of Candomblé and travel in Nigeria, Seljan would declare that

“Yoruba is the greatest of the African cultural influences in Brazil, because its legends and traditions still inspire literature, the arts, and the mystical unconscious of our people.”^{xxi} She returned frequently to Salvador, where she became an initiate in Opô Afonjá and soaked in the history and stories of Candomblé in Bahia that Mãe Senhora would share. Seljan used these stories, as well as her studies into West African spiritism and Yoruba, to craft novels and plays on Afro-Brazilian religious themes. Beyond propelling Zora Seljan to Nigeria when the opportunity arrived, her experience exemplified the fascination Candomblé held for Brazil’s affluent cultural avant-garde, particularly in Rio de Janeiro.

In 1955, when Mãe Senhora travelled to Rio de Janeiro for the funeral of one of her sons, Zora Seljan organized three receptions in her honor. Recounting them to Pierre Verger, Seljan captured the fascination Afro-Brazilian religion held for high-society artists and intellectuals. The first reception, held at the home of a magazine editor, “a beautiful apartment in Urca, with views of the Sugarloaf and the bay,” was attended by artists and musicians, who listened to “several folkloric tunes” and a recital of “black poetry.”^{xxii} The second reception, “more for leftist writers,” was at “one of the most sumptuous mansions [in Rio... the owner] has dedicated himself wholeheartedly to popular causes, so this palace is today playing the true role of palaces.” The third was in her former apartment in Copacabana, “a luxurious apartment, with an enormous terrace suitable to a good party,” lent to her by friends who were away “summering.” At the party, with “too many guests to list” a thirty-person folkloric ensemble danced traditional sambas.^{xxiii}

Seljan’s letter highlighted privileged settings and interesting people (she met Antonio Olinto at one of the parties and they would soon marry) as well as their investment in black culture and folklore. This was all part of a cultural and artistic project Seljan had embarked upon to “influence the creation of a Brazilian style of theater.” She explained to Verger “We have all of this rich material from the African, Indigenous and Iberian traditions. It is an embryonic theater that we must develop in order to popularize our own myths. It is not fair, for example, that our northeastern troubadours speak of Jupiter and not Xangô (hail!). Those gods only came to us through Homer and the theater. We can create, here in Brazil, a totally new theater with a clear national character.”^{xxiv} Seljan was dedicated to a modernist project of replacing Brazil’s “colonized” culture of European influences with a “national” culture born of folklore and rooted in Brazil’s African and Indigenous influences. European classics would be replaced by West-

African spiritism and its Brazilian derivatives would become Brazil's new mythology and literary canon. She began to write to Verger in Yoruba, and when she signed her name, she would punctuate it with a double axe, symbol of Xangô.

In 1955, Zora Seljan married Antonio Olinto, a writer and literary critic originally from Minas Gerais. I interviewed Antonio Olinto in May, 2006, in the study of the Copacabana apartment building where he and Zora Seljan lived since 1960. She had recently passed away and our conversation was steeped by a sense of loss that drew him into recollection of the journey into Afro-Brazilian and African culture that Zora Seljan had taken him on. Before we began to talk about their experience in Lagos, he showed me rooms of African masks, carvings and textiles that he collected in West Africa. When I asked Olinto how he became interested in Africa, he replied "because of Zora. She was interested in Yoruba culture, in Candomblé culture. She brought me into that medium. I had never thought about Candomblé in my life."^{xxv} He too became an initiate in the terreiro of Mãe Senhora. When we met, he was preparing to travel to Salvador for Opô Afonjá's Festival of Oxossi, which would be held in memory of Zora Seljan.

Olinto reflected that "when I went to Africa, I was a writer without a subject. In Africa, I gained a topic - Africa itself." In addition to *Brasileiros na África* (1964), Olinto wrote a trilogy celebrating the connections between Brazil and Africa: *The Water House* (1969), *The King of Ketu* (1980), and *The Throne of Glass* (1987). Olinto explained to me that "we have to be very faithful to the [African] tradition. That tradition helped create us. We are not Europeans. We are Brazilians mixed with Africa..." Olinto wrote himself into the black Brazilian characters of *The Water House*. In the text, they originate in the Minas Gerais town of Piau where he was born. He named one of the protagonists Antonio. I asked him about this and he smiled and replied "yes, there is an Antonio there."^{xxvi}

On two separate occasions, Antonio Olinto told me the story of how he and Zora Seljan gained the opportunity to go to Nigeria. As he told the story, their opportunity to travel to Africa came as a result of the national political crisis that followed the sudden resignation of President Jânio Quadros in August, 1961. The military attempted to block leftist vice president João Goulart from assuming the presidency. The crisis was resolved through a compromise by which Goulart became president but his cabinet ministers were appointed by Congress and headed by a prime minister. Through 1962, Minas Gerais Congressman Tancredo Neves was Prime Minister.

At a reception, Neves offered his fellow *mineiro* Antonio Olinto a diplomatic posting as cultural attaché and asked him where he wanted to go. Olinto replied that he wanted to go to Nigeria. Neves was surprised by the response and asked why. Olinto recalled that “he thought it was strange that I asked to go to Nigeria. ‘Why didn’t you ask for France?’”^{xxvii} Olinto responded that he had several reasons: he had ties to Bahia, was involved in Candomblé, and his wife wrote on Yoruba religion. “I asked for Nigeria for cultural reasons, because Zora and I are in that environment here, that black environment here, inside of black culture. Nigeria was the Rome of Yorubá culture, it was Rome - the base. Nigeria and Dahomey. For her it was great. She developed her literature. For me too.”^{xxviii} While Tancredo Neves did not understand why Olinto would choose Lagos over any other city in the world, he arranged the appointment.

At the time, Pierre Verger gave a different account of the circumstances that allowed Olinto and Braga to go to Nigeria. His impression, shared by others in the intellectual circles around Afro-Brazilian culture in Salvador, was that Olinto campaigned unsuccessfully to become ambassador. In November, 1961, Pierre Verger wrote to a friend, saying that he had learned from a the head of the Itamaraty Cultural Division that in spite of the “waves” Zora Seljan had made, “mobilizing all of Brazil’s intellectual circles” in order to have Olinto named as ambassador to Nigeria, Itamaraty would name a career diplomat for the post. Olinto would be offered an appointment as cultural attaché.^{xxix} The difference between these accounts highlights Olinto’s construction of a narrative situating himself within Afro-Brazilian culture, alongside Africa, and at the center of the narrative of a Brazilian political crisis, navigating its opportunities through regional personal connections. Olinto’s account accentuated Tancredo Neves’ surprise, which helps position Olinto and Seljan “inside” Afro-Brazilian culture. By calling Nigeria Brazil’s “Rome,” Olinto drew into his personal narrative Zora Seljan’s mantra that African religion and culture should become the foundations of a truly national Brazilian culture. Olinto’s account positioned him to describe his sojourn in Nigeria as the birthplace of his identity as a writer.

“At Home” In Nigeria

Olinto and Seljan disembarked in Lagos in June, 1962, carrying Brazilian diplomatic passports and sixteen crates of books and paintings by Brazilian artists.^{xxx} The first members of the new diplomatic mission to arrive, they checked into the Federal Palace Hotel, which would

house the Brazilian embassy for its first six months. That night they were greeted by Romana da Conceição, a contact of Verger's in Lagos who had been born in Pernambuco in 1892 and moved to Nigeria in 1900. She had assembled a group of agudás from the Brazilian neighborhood in Lagos to celebrate Olinto and Seljan's arrival by performing the *Bumba-meu-boi*, and allegorical dance performed during northeastern Brazilian Christmas festivities. Antonio Olinto and Zora Seljan had travelled to Africa and they were greeted by Brazil. What is more, they were received with the folkloric Brazil that they, like other modernist intellectuals and artists, celebrated as the essence of authentic Brazilian culture.

Antonio Carlos Tavares arrived soon after Olinto and Seljan and began organizing the new embassy and preparing for the arrival of Brazil's first ambassador, Souza Bandeira. The embassy's agenda involved a spectrum of commercial, political and cultural activities. Souza Bandeira's only official act before his death was to meet with the Nigerian foreign minister to suggest the creation of an international association of exporters of cacao, a commodity produced in both countries. Tavares, in his first meeting with the Nigerian foreign minister, also stressed the common challenge of under-development. And even though Olinto's passion was culture, he understood the political and economic circumstances of post-independence West Africa, and the first chapters of *Brasileiros na África* gave perhaps the most detailed survey of the politics and ideologies of decolonization published in Brazil at the time. As he explained, "for Brazil, with its tropical-Atlantic orientation, a precise understanding of what is happening in Africa is of the greatest importance. No other country can better understand the challenges and opportunities of the new Africa," because of its African heritage and geography.^{xxxii} But Souza Bandeira's death at the beginning of the year, followed by that of Tavares derailed this agenda. There was practically no trade between Nigeria and Brazil. The main Brazilian export was propane tanks that had to first be shipped to Germany for transshipment to Lagos.^{xxxiii} In fact, from 1962 to 1972, Brazil exported a total of only \$221,000 in goods to Nigeria.^{xxxiiii}

What remained was Seljan and Olinto's interest in exploring and promoting ethnic and cultural ties between Brazil and Nigeria, as well as the official effort to present Brazil as a racial democracy. In terms of projecting the image of Brazilian racial democracy in Nigeria, the embassy's campaign began by seizing an opportunity to compare Brazilian race relations favorably to those of the United States. In January, 1963, a Lagos newspaper reported on the decision of James Meredith, the first black student to enroll at the University of Mississippi, to

leave school under the racist pressure he faced. The newspaper's editorial picked up a Brazilian press release announcing that "the neighboring Brazilians were so inspired they offered Good Jim a scholarship to study in a more friendly and conducive atmosphere."^{xxxiv} In the end, James Meredith would return to the University of Mississippi, but the editorial presented an early opportunity to frame Brazil "in a particularly sympathetic light before the Nigerian public."^{xxxv}

At the same time, Seljan and Olinto combined their interest in discovering Brazilian cultural traces in West Africa with their task of promoting Brazil as connected to Nigeria through shared ethnicity. In January, on Verger's recommendation, they travelled to Benin to witness the religious festival of *Nosso Senhor do Bonfim*, derived from a Catholic festival in Salvador, Bahia. Olinto reported to Itamaraty on his trip, marveling at the number of people with Brazilian surnames, including the president's wife (Rego). He described the festival as beginning with a "true Brazilian 'Bumba-meu-boi,' with hundreds of people singing songs in Portuguese... The figures of the ox, the horse, the rhea and of the giant, traditional to these processions in the Brazilian northeast, are all preserved in Dahomey."^{xxxvi} Olinto found that "Brazil continues to exist in Africa, through the miracle of a culture that refused to die."^{xxxvii}

Over the course of their year and a half in Lagos, Olinto and Seljan travelled frequently in western Nigeria and Benin, seeking centers of Brazilian settlement and sources of African influence over Brazil. For Olinto, this landscape felt familiar. In *Brasileiros na África*, he declares:

In time, the Brazilian presence in Africa could be felt more and more strongly. The peoples and landscapes of that coast became, for me, familiar. It became easy for me to get into the Africanness of things... Nothing African seemed alien because traces of Brazilian influence appeared in the smallest details. I was always shocked that I was not in Rio, because the truth is I was at home. This certainty about belonging in this environment confronted me in Lagos and Pôrto Nôvo, in Ibadan and Queto, in Ifé and Uidá, all along the territory divided today between Dahomey and Nigeria. Old Brazilian colonial architecture accompanied me down the roads.^{xxxviii}

In both his diplomatic correspondence and his later writing, Olinto repeated the theme that as a Brazilian he felt perfectly at home in West Africa. He recounted riding in a car with Romana da Conceição when a Nigerian boy yelled "oymbô," meaning "white man," at him. Conceição replied "not oymbô, agudá, like me." This encounter allowed Olinto to reflect that "It is natural

that Europeans would be received reservedly in more exclusively Nigerian settings. Understanding different customs is not a trait of the common ‘European Man.’ But the Brazilian case is completely different... the ‘agudá,’ or Brazilian, whatever his color, is closer to the Nigerian in general and the African descended from Brazilians in particular.^{xxxix}

The idea of a shared identity between Brazil and Nigeria served as the centerpiece of Olinto and Seljan’s work in Lagos, which culminated with an exposition, “Contemporary Brazilian Art,” organized in May, 1963, by Zora Seljan with the collection she brought in her baggage. The exposition, held over two weeks at the Nigerian Museum in Lagos, included 104 paintings and engravings by Brazilian artists, including works by prominent Brazilian artists like Emiliano Di Cavalcanti, Dionisio del Santo, Lenio Braga, Iberé Camargo, Mario Cravo, Sylvia de Leão Charleo and Seljan’s fellow Opô Afonjá initiate, Caribé. As Seljan explained, the artists “got together to visit Africa with me, through their paintings.”^{xl}

The exhibit demonstrated Brazil’s cultural ties to Nigeria, and served as a platform for projecting an image of the “humane treatment received by Africans in Brazil.”^{xli} The mantra of Brazil’s racial democracy was implicit in the work, which Seljan described as demonstrating the “ethnic formation of Brazil and its spiritual democracy.”^{xlii} It was also addressed directly by the Nigerian Minister of Labor, an agudá who inaugurated the exposition. He began his address “humorously remarking that the gathering was unique in that it was devoid of that dangerous atmosphere of master-servant relationship.”^{xliii} He declared that “the tremendous goodwill Nigeria has towards Brazil was the result of the kind treatment received by Nigerians during their service in Brazil... in spite of the unkindness of the slave trade age, Nigerians affected still returned home without any feeling of bitterness toward Brazilians. Rather, he continued, they considered Brazil their first home and would do everything to defend her.”^{xliv}

Zora Seljan presented the exhibition as evidence of the fundamental role of Nigeria in shaping Brazilian culture, returning to the notes she sounded almost a decade earlier and which Olinto would still refer to after her death. Seljan explained that “As in the past Roman artists and poets who followed the Greek tradition showed the strength of Jupiter, the grace of Venus, or the wisdom of Pallas Atheneia, Brazilian artists today, inspired by Nigerian traditions, sing the worth of Shango and express on canvass the majesty of his figure with the double axe.”^{xlv} While Olinto characterized Nigeria as Brazil’s Rome, Seljan went further, suggesting Brazil was the new Rome, and Nigeria its Greek inspiration.

The exhibit attracted positive press coverage, particularly because of the Labor Minister's remarks. A dissenting note appeared in the Lagos *Sunday Times*, where columnist John Rover took issue with the Labor Minister's characterization of slavery in Brazil as benign. Under the headline "Culture - Brazilians Took This From Us," Rover interviewed Olinto, who he called "an interesting character," who told him "our culture in Brazil is framed up from Yoruba, Ibo, Hausa, Efik and other Nigerian cultures." Rover turned his eye to Olinto himself: "His office and home are decorated with carvings and our locally woven cloths are conspicuously paraded - his window and door blinds are made of Yoruba printed (adire) cloths. The floors of both his office and his house are covered with our raffia mats. Well, how did Nigerian culture penetrate into Brazil? It all happened during the slave trade which depopulated Africa."^{xlvi}

"Brazilian like me"

At the time of Tavares' death a few months after the exhibition, Zora Seljan and Antonio Olinto were on vacation in Rio, and decided it was time leave Nigeria. They had gathered material for a lifetime of writing on Brazil's connections to Africa. They had also witnessed the crises that destabilized the embassy, and had come to appreciate the irony of the Brazilian diplomatic presence in Africa: though the embassy and its staff sought every opportunity to characterize Brazil as a racial democracy whose culture and people were deeply shaped by (Yoruban) Africa, everyone at the embassy was white. The embassy begged the question Seljan used as the title of her book, *In Brazil, are there still people of my color?*

Olinto recalled that he and Zora Seljan had struggled over this question to the point of suggesting the name of Olinto's possible replacement as cultural attache. They resolved that "We didn't want to fight, but we wanted them to take advantage of our blacks... not just in Africa, but also in Europe. To send them as cultural attachés or as embassy staff. Isn't Brazil full of black intellectuals?... This was a struggle, and in the end, they haven't done it. Even Jânio Quadros, who was crazy, sent Raymundo [Souza Dantas], you know?... And [Souza Dantas] was humiliated by Itamaraty. Imagine... what they do to an ambassador who is black. They humiliate."^{xlvii} Souza Dantas was a black journalist sent as ambassador to Ghana in 1961 by presidential, rather than Itamaraty appointment. He was ignored by Itamaraty and disrespected by his subordinates, an experience he recounted in the memoir *África Difícil: Missão Condenada* (1964). Olinto explained that Zora Seljan's book was intended to provoke

the Brazilian government to change. Olinto agreed: “we need a black in the embassy. Its ridiculous that there isn’t even one.”^{xlviii}

In my next interview with Olinto, we returned to the question, and he gave an account of a meeting with President Goulart in which he recommended his successor as cultural attaché in Lagos. He reasoned that Goulart “is an intelligent and progressive man” and decided to tell him that he needed to send a black person as his replacement. Who would Olinto recommend?

It came to me. Adhemar Ferreira da Silva, three-time Olympic champion, lawyer - he held a law degree - intelligent, black. So here was a black who could be cultural attaché. It was within his abilities. I went to Brasília and tracked down a friend who worked in the presidential press office and told him: ‘If I make this suggestion to Itamaraty, it is going to be tough. They are just going to ask a lot of questions. This can only get done with a presidential order. I want to speak to the president’... I spent three days going to the palace and waiting. On the third day... he was going down the hall and I approached him. I said Mr. President, you can do something wonderful: name the first black Brazilian diplomat. He asked ‘how?’ I am a cultural attaché named by Tancredo Neves, and I am leaving my position after three years. I suggest that you name a black and I already have the name. Adhemar Ferreira da Silva. And he says “OK, but... excellent idea.’ Not just three-time champion but also a lawyer. He speaks English, I have spoken with him in English. He says ‘It’s a good idea.’ And he nominated him.^{xlix}

That Olinto had been in the post a single year, rather than three, that he was asking the president to name the second black diplomat, not the first, and that Adhemar Ferreira did earn a law degree, but in 1968, after returning from Nigeria, all underscore the constructed nature of memory, and these mischaracterizations add emphasis to his telling. And these emphases shape Olinto’s reconstruction of the episode to stress the foreign ministry’s bureaucratic hostility to racial integration, as well as the importance of an individual act that in this case followed the traditional Brazilian script for petitioning authorities in their antechambers. “All of this,” Olinto stressed, “Was because of that question: In Brazil are there still people of my color?”¹

Olinto had already approached Adhemar Ferreira about the idea. He recounted that Ferreira liked the idea but said “they won’t accept.” In his telling Olinto accentuated these words, giving them an fatalistic and resigned tone. Olinto replied: “I agree with you. If it were you telling me, I would also say they are not going to accept. But I am going to talk to the president. When you want something done, you just do it. Would you accept? ‘Of course,’ he

said.”ⁱⁱ Olinto and Seljan returned to Lagos for another three months, where they prepared for Ferreira’s arrival in February, 1964. They would stay for a week after his arrival and introduce him to their contacts in Lagos, especially among the Brazilian Descendants’ Association.

Adhemar Ferreira da Silva won Olympic gold medals for the triple jump in Helsinki in 1952 and in Melbourne in 1956. He set longstanding records, and was reputedly the first athlete to do a victory lap. He was a proficient language learner who taught himself phrases in Finnish before competing in Helsinki, endearing him to spectators. He subsequently learned English, and limited Japanese, Italian, Spanish, German and French. Since he finished law school after his time in Lagos, his highest degree at the time of his appointment was as a lathe operator, from a São Paulo vocational high school. In 1956, he played the role of “Morte” in Vinicius de Moraes’ play *Orfeu da Conceição*. He reprised the role in the Oscar-winning film *Black Orpheus*. With two Olympic gold medals and a performance in an Oscar-winning film, Adhemar Ferreira was by far the most decorated Brazilian.

At the end of February, Ferreira arrived, with his wife and two children. He was acclaimed in the Nigerian press as an example of what Nigerian athletes should aspire to. Newspapers ran over a dozen articles about his athletic achievements, with headlines like “Olympic Champ Turns Diplomat,” and he garnered notice whenever he attended Nigerian sports events.ⁱⁱⁱ When he attended an athletics championship, the loudspeaker system announced Ferreira’s presence immediately after noting the arrival of President Nnamdi Azikiwe. Ferreira recounted to Itamaraty that that Azikiwe, “also an athlete in his youth,” (he played football at Lincoln University) motioned him over and told him: “Welcome. I was also present that afternoon at the Helsinki stadium, when you stunned the crowds with your jumps. I hope that through your presence among us, Nigeria will also come to have its own da Silva.”ⁱⁱⁱⁱ

Ferreira faced difficult adjustments with the position of cultural attaché. Brazilian-born agudás began to approach him for the pensions that Seljan had given them. Ferreira had no knowledge of the pensions and no budget to pay them. He also learned that despite Olinto and Seljan’s passion for Candomblé, the Brazilian descendants in Lagos were averse to spiritism. Romana da Conceição told him “I don’t know and don’t want to know about those things. That’s for backward people. People from the bush.”^{lv} In fact, Ferreira soon realized that his job needed to be mainly educational. The students, journalists and others that contacted him showed

“complete ignorance of Brazil.” Among the points he stressed, Ferreira lectured that, “though in Brazil, like Nigeria, there is syncretism, 95% of the population is Catholic.”^{lv}

Since Adhemar Ferreira’s approach to his role as cultural attache differed fundamentally from Olinto’s, he found a very different Nigeria and represented a very different Brazil. He did not emphasize cultural similarities between the two sides of the Atlantic. Instead, sought educate Nigerians about Brazil, giving lectures and press conferences, speaking about Brazilian geography, culture, music, commerce and industry. He played Brazilian music on his guitar and carried records with him to events like Ary Barroso’s “Aquarela do Brasil.” He arranged with a local radio station to include segments with Brazilian music. The albums he requested from Itamaraty represented a cross-section of the Brazilian popular music, including Dorival Caymi, Pixinguinha, Elisete Cardoso, Baden Powell, Jorge Ben, regional music from Minas Gerais and Recife, as well as Bossa Nova.^{lvi}

Adhemar Ferreira was preceded by the new ambassador, José Osvaldo Meira Penna, who arrived in December, 1963. During Meira Penna’s credential ceremony before President Azikiwe, both the ambassador and the president engaged in a scripted public ritual of discussing the similarities between the two countries, noting Nigeria’s cultural influence over Brazil and Brazil’s cultural influence over Nigeria. Meira Penna’s remarks followed instructions given by the Foreign Ministry about the proper way to describe Brazil: a developing power and a racial democracy. Over the course of his year in Nigeria, he would repeatedly question the Foreign Ministry about this message, its logic, and what he perceived as the Ministry’s inconsistency in delivering it. But as he stood next to President Azikiwe, Meira Penna proclaimed that, thanks to African labor, “Brazil is an experiment of the successful establishment of a modern industrial civilization in the tropics.”

Meira Penna noted that Brazil had become the country with the second largest population of African descent outside of Nigeria and “but for the sweat and toil of the Africans, surely the early colonists of Brazil could never have faced the appalling conditions of a hostile environment.” He never mentioned slavery, instead transferring the suffering of Africans in the slave system to a shared struggle to “surmount geographical determinisms.” This task was undertaken in a “patriarchal society” where “bonds between the two races were not based upon servitude but upon respect and affection. This indeed was the source of the racial democracy of which we are rightfully so proud.” He drew links between Nigerians in Brazil and Brazilians in

Nigeria, mentioning that in millions of Brazilians “there flows the generous blood of those people who came from Nigeria,” and spoke of how he felt moved by the way had been received by “those of your fellow countrymen who still like to call themselves Brazilian.”^{lvii} For his part, the Nigerian President echoed Meira Penna, praising Brazil’s “sane attitude to the race problem.” The *West African Pilot*, a newspaper aligned with Azikiwe, made the event its lead story, and its banner headline quoted President Azikiwe, proclaiming “Brazil, a laboratory of inter-racial cooperation.”^{lviii}

For Meira Penna and Adhemar Ferreira, the embassy itself was a laboratory of inter-racial cooperation. Ferreira was the first black Brazilian the ambassador had ever worked closely with. When I interviewed him, Meira Penna recalled a road trip they took through western Nigeria. He said that during the trip :

I had never had the experience of interacting so intimately with a black person, you know. In Brazil there was a big difference still... But after three, four, five days, I suddenly realized the following: that the reactions we had, that he and I had, were exactly the same... In other words, I felt Brazilian like him, with a Brazilian reaction. And he had nothing in common with the Africans, other than the fact that he was black, his race... His skin was black, but our reactions were the reactions of Brazilians. We commented to each other about things and found them funny. He was really jovial... From then on I really became what you could call culturalist. I think the real factor in shaping the identity of a people is culture, not race... We were Brazilian, I felt Brazilian, it was not like if I were with an African.^{lix}

Though Meira Penna always stressed the comfortable coexistence of blacks and whites in Brazil in his public addresses, on a personal level, he was distant from black Brazilians. It took traveling for days by car across Nigeria with Adhemar to realize that they were similar.

Meira Penna reported to Itamaraty about the trip. He emphasized that Ferreira had been “good company.” But he also stressed the symbolic benefit of Ferreira’s presence in driving home the official imagery of Brazilian racial democracy: “Aside from representing a living example of the importance of the African element in Brazilian ethnicity, Mr. Ferreira da Silva generated great sympathy among our hosts with his personal ‘charm’ and his guitar, thanks to which we could immediately demonstrate through music the reality of intimate cultural relations between Brazil and Yorubaland that we had just spoken of.”^{lx} In this sense, Ferreira was literally a token. And though Meira Penna noted his “great help in the job of public relations and

disseminating information about Brazil,” he emphasized his musical skills and skin color as his principal contributions to the representation of Brazil in Nigeria.

At times, Meira Penna argued with Itamaraty when he felt that the tools he was given to represent Brazil’s racial democracy were inconsistent or contradictory. This was particularly the case when the Itamaraty Cultural Division sent black Brazilian actor Antonio Sampaio on a tour of West Africa, accompanying the film *Ganga Zumba*, in which he played Zumbi dos Palmares, the leader of a seventeenth century northeastern Brazilian runaway slave community fighting the Portuguese. In the film, Ganga Zumba fights and is eventually defeated by the Portuguese. When the film arrived, Meira Penna screened it privately with the Lebanese owner of the largest chain of movie theaters in Nigeria, and he concluded that the film should not be shown. On one hand, Meira Penna reported that the owner of the Nigerian theater chain expressed concern that the film would likely not be allowed by the state censors “not only because of its scenes of violence but for its ideological content.” On the other, Meira Penna believed it did not present an image of Brazil “consistent with our interests in this part of the world.”

Meira Penna wrote to the Brazilian Foreign Minister reiterating what he understood the official discourse about Brazil to be and how he found exhibiting the film inconsistent with the Brazilian message. He gave a history of the study of race in Brazil, explaining “all of the scholars of the African problem in Brazil, from Nina Rodrigues through Athur Ramos, [Arthur] Hehl Neiva and Gilberto Freyre, have insisted in constructing Brazil as the world’s most admirable example of coexistence and harmony between the races.” These scholars took pains to stress that even colonial slavery was far more benign in Brazil than in other parts of the Americas, and this in turn served as the basis for promoting Brazil’s image. “Rightly or wrongly, true or illusory” Meira Penna continued, the idea that Brazil was free of racial prejudices represented “an essential principle” of Brazilian propaganda abroad. “That Brazil is a ‘racial democracy’ is always repeated, at any opportunity, by our representatives abroad.”

Given that racial democracy was the official Brazilian national representation overseas, Meira Penna professed himself perplexed that the “first expression of our cinematic art to be shown in Nigeria would seem deliberately designed to deny those principles.” He found the scenes of violence and sexuality particularly objectionable and wondered how a Nigerian public of “generally low cultural level,” could dissociate the resistance to Portuguese slavery in Palmares from the wars of liberation in Africa:

The motive of the film is obscure: its as though we were watching the rebellion in Angola, the civil war in the Congo. The film seems intended to train Zulu guerillas in South Africa, or to have been tailor-made for Misters Nkrumah or Ben-Bella [Presidents of Ghana and Algeria]. The decapitated heads rolling on the ground, the prisoners beaten to death, hearts cut out by knife, rapes and ambushes, war without quarter between whites and blacks. I don't know if these things even happen in Africa (except in the ghastly world of Chinese communist propaganda). In any case, it is anachronistic and has nothing to do with Brazil. As propaganda for Brazil, I frankly cannot agree with it.

Ganga Zumba was a film about black resistance to white domination. Though those sentiments might have resonated particularly well with an African audience and reflected Brazilian solidarity with struggles for liberation, Meira Penna objected and recommended withdrawing the film from Africa and scaling back Antônio Sampaio's tour, on the grounds that Sampaio did not speak English or French and because the actor "already faces financial difficulties." He concluded that "it is hard under these circumstances to see which is more disastrous: the success or the failure of the 'tour.'"

Pitanga declared "Meira Penna was totally racist." He opposed Pitanga's trip and his message, and prevented the public presentation of *Ganga Zumba*. But Adhemar Ferreira discreetly worked to circumvent Meira Penna's opposition. Pitanga recalled that when he arrived in Lagos, Ferreira took him aside and told him that he was going to have difficulties with the ambassador. He encouraged Pitanga not to react to Meira Penna's hostility, while he worked "within the black world" to arrange for "strategic people, important people in the government" to meet with him and see his films. Ferreira discreetly arranged screenings for Nigerian political authorities and interviews with the press. Pitanga made several public appearances. The Nigerian *Sunday Post* described him as "storming" Lagos and told the story of a "product of a humble birth who has been able to stumble on a career and make a huge success of it," adding that he would inspire others to "similar fits of unexpected, world-acclaimed achievements." The *Morning Post* described *Ganga Zumba* as "striking... [telling] with much human touch the story of slaves taken from some Negro countries and how they were treated by their white masters (the Europeans) in the sugar cane plantations. The brutality meted out to the slaves by the whites and how they were deprived of their rights and their freedom of association are keenly portrayed in the film." The report was illustrated by a still from *Ganga Zumba* showing Pitanga, clutching a

large knife, struggling with a white man. Pitanga recalled that his experience in Lagos was different than that with the other Brazilian embassies. Elsewhere, Brazilian diplomats collaborated with his project. Here he faced both the opposition of the ambassador and the support of a “brother.”

Meira Penna’s reaction to the film and to Pitanga’s tour illustrated both the changing political climate in Brazil between the nationalist-populist impulse toward Africa of 1961 and 1964 and the military regime, and between the Brazilian military regime and African political culture. Showing his political sympathies, Meira Penna declared “among the objectives of the revolutionary movement that took place in Brazil last April is bringing good sense back to public administration.”^{lxi} Meira Penna’s idea of what the military regime saw as good sense cast *Ganga Zumba* as an anathema, even though its depiction of resistance to colonial domination was the kind of message most likely to resonate in 1960s Africa.

At the end of his tenure in Nigeria, Meira Penna submitted a report that outlined the difficulties the Brazilian embassy had experienced and that questioned the purpose of diplomatic relations in Africa, specifying that a sense of national grandeur and historical affinity was no grounds for the sacrifices he and his ministry made. Was its “bureaucratic existence” justified? He described the curse and related the challenges the embassy and its staff had faced. He also related the costs - in 1964, the government had spent over \$125,000 on the embassy and its staff. He said, 90% of the work of the embassy consisted of tending to its own existence - life consisted of funerals, lost luggage, electrical, telephone and mechanical problems, resolving the chaos of the filing system, keeping the telex functional, dealing with miscommunication caused by “pidgin English” and “français petit-nègre,” obstinacy, impertinence, lethargy, usurious and corrupt practices.^{lxii} He argued the problem lay both with the bureaucratic demands of maintaining a Brazilian diplomatic post, and with what he saw as the backwardness of Nigeria. Meira Penna wryly asked, “why do we have a shredder when documents already arrive shredded by the dirty hands of those who brought them from the post or the stationer?”^{lxiii}

Why was Brazil in Africa? Meira Penna suggested that the embassies in Lagos, Dakar and Accra were created out of the “demagogic enthusiasm” of the Jânio Quadros era. His instructions had been to solidify the Brazilian presence in West Africa because of “historical and anthropological ties as old as our colonial life. It is a fact that, in the seventeenth and eighteenth century, the South Atlantic was almost a Lusitanian lake.” He related the string of trading posts

the Portuguese had created centuries earlier, from which “departed the ancestors of one of the most important elements of our population, or our ‘cosmic’ race.”^{lxiv} For Meira Penna, these sentimental reasons were insufficient to justify the human and economic costs of the embassy.

If Meira Penna expected better conditions for diplomats working in Lagos, the reality would be the opposite. The 1964 military coup in Brazil ended the period of populist and nationalist politics in which Jânio Quadros sent Raymundo Souza Dantas to Ghana as part of his Independent Foreign Policy, or João Goulart responded to Antonio Olinto’s personal appeal to name Adhemar Ferreira da Silva cultural attaché to Nigeria. The foreign policy of the first years of the military regime emphasized relations with the United States and Portugal, altogether neglecting Africa. Far from feeling “at home” in West Africa, Foreign Minister Juracy Magalhães (1966-67) declared “what is good for the United States is good for Brazil.”^{lxv} The new regime turned away from Africa and, more problematically from an African perspective, it tightened relations with Portugal just as the wars against Portuguese rule in Angola, Mozambique and Guiné-Bissau became one of the unifying concerns of independent African countries. The last thing that seemed appropriate in 1960s Africa was the idea that the Atlantic was a “Lusitanian lake.”

After the coup, students in Lagos protested the detention of Chinese journalists in Brazil, and the *Daily Times* condemned the detention of Portuguese African nationalists who had opened an office in Rio de Janeiro.^{lxvi} Meira Penna replied to the accusations with a letter to the editor declaring “no African national in Brazil... [has] been subject to any kind of action from the Brazilian authorities... My I bring to your notice that the present Brazilian Government, legally elected by the Brazilian Congress after a popular uprising which freed the country from a totalitarian ideology.”^{lxvii} Though technically they were still Portuguese, Angolan and Mozambican nationalists had, in fact, been arrested in Rio de Janeiro and questioned by both Naval Intelligence and by members of the Portuguese PIDE secret police. They were released through the intervention of Senegalese President Léopold Senghor.^{lxviii}

Meira Penna left Lagos in 1965. Adhemar Ferreira da Silva left a year later. Antonio Olinto recalled that Ferreira was “unhappy it was over. It’s what I said about Itamaraty, you know? When its not one of their people, you’re done - you’re out.” Later he added “What should Itamaraty have done?... Send him to Sweden, right? To Sweden. It would have been

pretty. A black Olympic champion as Brazilian cultural attaché in Sweden. It would have been great. But Itamaraty doesn't have that kind of courage."^{lxi}

The embassy in Lagos was left without an ambassador or a cultural attaché for the next five years. A decade after the Brazilian embassy opened, the connections between Brazil and Nigeria had actually diminished. The last Brazilian-born *agudás* had died. The Brazilian embassy was run with a skeletal staff. Little trade had developed. A first round of students sent to Brazil on scholarships were not replaced. By 1968, *chargé d'affaires* Pedro Polzin would write that the embassy "has for some time now lacked Brazilian staff."^{lxx} He also suggested that previous diplomatic staff had "without malice or premeditation, created an erroneous perception of our country... emphasizing only the folkloric similarities between the countries (*Bumba-meu-boi, acarajé...*) Forgetting altogether the considerable culture Brazil inherited from Europe. We now face the task of breaking this perception that Brazil is only of African descent."^{lxxi} Six months later, Polzin reported that the Cultural Department of the Embassy was almost completely inactive, "lacking a head or any publicity materials, it consists of some old films that no longer arouse any interest."^{lxxii}

Conclusion

Brazilians went to Nigeria offering the image of a racially mixed society in which the benign treatment of blacks by whites was supposed to signal Brazilian goodwill toward Nigeria. They were received politely, but as strangers. Writing concurrent with the wave of decolonization in Africa and the West Indies, Frantz Fanon vehemently criticized the structures and culture of white domination. He declared "To us, the man who adores the Negro is as 'sick' as the man who abominates him... In the absolute, the black man is no more to be loved than the Czech, and truly what is to be done is to set man free."^{lxxiii} Brazilian efforts to build ties with Nigeria foundered on this very question. Brazilian diplomatic entreaties were based on a sentimental embrace of the legacy of Africa in Brazil that ignored the fact that this legacy was rooted in slavery, and sought connections with Africa based on cultural expressions like *Candomblé* rather than the contemporary challenges of liberation and development. As a result, Brazil and its system of race relations remained exotic and irrelevant.

Some of Brazil's messengers, like Olinto and Seljan, held a deep conviction that Brazil and Nigeria were bound by a shared culture, and that an understanding of Nigeria was a

precondition for understanding Brazil. Others, like Meira Penna, made clear that he projected this image as a professional obligation, and in the course of carrying it out, he had the fortune of interacting closely enough with a black Brazilian to realize that they both came from the same culture. In one case, a Brazilian attaché designated to deliver a Christmas message on Nigerian radio brought the connections between Brazil and Africa to the point of ridicule. He began his address with the appropriate message about Brazilian racial harmony, proclaiming “many of us are of Portuguese descent, others of African or German or Italian or Japanese blood, etc., while millions of still other Brazilians are the product of the intermarriage and happy coexistence - thank God we have it - of people of different stocks.” He continued, describing regional Christmas traditions in Brazil: “The people of Bahia... pride themselves in their *acarajé*, which is our form of saying *jè akara*, the good old Yoruba dish. And in my own province of Pernambuco... a Christmas table is not acceptable if it does not include a cake called *pé de muleque*, which means *foot of negro*. It is simply delicious.”^{xxiv}

The white diplomat proclaiming Brazil to be a paradise of racial harmony by telling radio listeners how much he enjoyed his *foot of negro* was not a competent message, to be sure. The connections between Brazil and Nigeria were presented in more sophisticated ways by others. But these messages did not really resonate beyond the immediate environments where Brazilians made them. Nigerians certainly repeated them to Brazilians in scripted settings like Meira Penna’s presentation of credentials or at the inauguration of the Brazilian Art exhibit. But looking only at Brazilian sources distorts the picture of Brazil’s influence. The Brazilian embassy in Lagos maintained an exceptionally thorough news clipping service, and every time Brazil appeared in the press, the article was sent to Itamaraty. A review of years of runs of Nigerian newspapers re-focuses the image: the clippings in the Itamaraty archive are actually all of the press on Brazil in Nigeria in the 1960s, and from day to day and year to year, Brazil was almost wholly absent from Nigerians’ views of the world.

Reading the Nigerian newspapers as a whole creates an understanding that Brazil’s system of race relations, whatever it may be, held little significance for Nigerians, who were concerned with national questions, with neighboring countries, with Britain, and with the process of decolonization. Nigeria turned inward after Nnamdi Azikiwe was overthrown in 1966 and the country became absorbed in the Biafra War (1967-1970). That Brazil did not fit in this equation was clear to Adhemar Ferreira. Playing his guitar and records and lecturing across Nigeria for

three years, he sought to generate a rudimentary understanding of Brazil in an environment where “needless to say, our country is entirely unknown.”^{lxxv} Even the existence of a sizable population descended from Brazilians in Nigeria did not change this picture. To the contrary, in a country divided by regional and ethnic tensions, the existence of a Brazilian ethnic minority was less a novelty than another division.

From his position as Brazilian cultural attache in London in 1975, Antonio Olinto edited a periodical called the *Brazilian Gazette*. He proposed to the Brazilian ambassador in Lagos, Heráclito Lima, that the *Gazette* devote a special issue to Brazilian-Nigerian relations. Lima responded cautiously, concerned that Olinto might spotlight the agudá population, which the ambassador believed would displease the Nigerian military regime. Prior to the 1966 Nigerian military coup, a “Brazilian Democratic Party” had been established in Lagos that was later banned along with all other political parties.^{lxxvi} Lima reported to Itamaraty that “the Nigerian authorities always express reservations about this subject [the agudás], not only because one of the Brazilians wanted to create a political party, but because Nigerians... wish the ‘descendants of Brazilians’ would be, first and foremost good Nigerians.” Lima suggested that the issue should only be published only if its final version was edited within Itamaraty, not only because of the question of the agudás, but to avoid “Olinto’s wish” to include “an exaggerated emphasis on religious themes (macumba, Xangô, Orixas) that might offend Nigerians.”^{lxxvii}

Brazilian diplomats in Nigeria bore a sentimental sense of shared heritage that was based on the imagination that all Brazilians possessed Africanness. This message failed to move Nigerians and was cut short by the Brazilian military regime’s renewed affinity for the United States and Portugal. These diplomats treated Nigeria as a mirror that was meant to reflect specific things about Brazilian cultural and racial identity. Brazilian self-representations in Nigerian are revealing of Brazil’s racial values system. They illustrated the option available to white Brazilians to possess blackness and Africanness as Brazilians. And they reveal the limits faced by Brazilians of color who could serve as tokens of Brazil’s African heritage, like Adhemar Ferreira, but could not reflect the struggles born in slavery that were conveyed by Antonio Sampaio. Finally, they exemplify a crucial characteristic of the idea of racial democracy that gained expression in Brazil: because it was based on an expansive definition of Africanness as a shared national characteristic, experiences of racial inequality were dwarfed by

the imagination that Brazil was a country of “Africans of every color,” and even that Africa was Brazil.

ⁱ “Envoy falls 3 floors to his death,” *Sunday Times*, September 15, 1963. “Recortes de Jornal. Falecimento do Secretário Antonio Carlos da Souza Tavares,” September 28, 1963. Dispatch 153, Embassy in Lagos to Foreign Ministry, *AHI*.

ⁱⁱ “Envoy falls 3 floors to his death,” *Sunday Times*, September 15, 1963. “Recortes de Jornal. Falecimento do Secretário Antonio Carlos da Souza Tavares,” September 28, 1963. Dispatch 153, Embassy in Lagos to Foreign Ministry, *AHI*; Ebenezer Curtis, “Tribute to Carlos Tavares,” *Nigerian Morning Post*, September 20, 1963, p. 11, *BL*.

ⁱⁱⁱ “Chegada e posse do Ministro Luiz de Souza Bandeira.” January 22, 1963. Telegram 8, Embassy in Lagos to Foreign Ministry, *AHI*.

^{iv} “Transporte do corpo do Embaixador Luiz de Souza Bandeira,” February 10, 1963. Telegram 29. Embassy in Lagos to Foreign Ministry, *AHI*.

^v José Oswaldo Meira Penna to Minister Vasco Leitão da Cunha, March 5, 1965, “A Lei de Parkinson e a Embaixada em Lagos.” Dispatch 63, Embassy in Lagos to Foreign Ministry, *AHI*.

^{vi} José Oswaldo Meira Penna to Minister Vasco Leitão da Cunha, March 5, 1965, “A Lei de Parkinson e a Embaixada em Lagos.” Dispatch 63, Embassy in Lagos to Foreign Ministry, *AHI*.

^{vii} P. D. Curtin, “‘The White Man’s Grave:’ Image and Reality, 1750-1850,” *Journal of British Studies*, 1:1 (1961), p. 94. (94-110)

^{viii} Cited in Beatriz Góis Dantas, *Vovô Nagô e papai branco: Usos e abusos da África no Brasil*. Rio de Janeiro: Edições Graal, 1988, p. 150.

^{ix} Góis Dantas, p. 151.

^x “Un Pays D’Africains de Toutes les Couleurs,” *Fraternité Matin*, October 23, 1972, p. 9.

^{xi} Antonio Olinto, *Brasileiros na África*. Rio de Janeiro: Edições GRD, 1964, p. 259.

^{xii} Zora Seljan, *No Brasil, ainda tem gente da minha cor?* Salvador: Prefeitura da Cidade de Salvador, 1978, p. 26; Interview with Antonio Olinto, May 26, 2006.

^{xiii} Jeffrey Lesser, *A Discontented Diaspora: Japanese Brazilians and the Meanings of Ethnic Militancy, 1960-1980*. Durham: Duke University Press, 2007.

^{xiv} J. Lorand Matory, “The ‘Cult of Nations’ and the Ritualization of Purity,” *South Atlantic Quarterly*, 100:1 (2001), p. 175.

^{xv} Lisa A. Lindsay, “‘To Return to the Bosom of their Fatherland’: Brazilian Immigrants in Nineteenth-Century Lagos,” *Slavery and Abolition*, 15:1 (1994), p. 23. [22-50]

^{xvi} Matory, “Cult of Nations,” p. 200.

^{xvii} J. Lorand Matory, “The English Professors of Brazil: On the Diasporic Roots of the Yoruba Nation,” *Comparative Studies in Society and History*, 41:1 (1999), p. 73.

^{xviii} Peter Fry, “Gallus Africanus Est, ou como Roger Bastide se tornou africano no Brasil,” in *Revisitando a Terra de Contrastes: A Atualidade da Obra de Roger Bastide*, ed. Olga R. de Moraes von Simon. São Paulo: USP-FFLCH, 1986. p. 31-44]

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- ^{xix} Beatriz Góis Dantas, *Vovó Nagô e Papai Branco*. Rio de Janeiro: Graal, 1988; Roberto Motta, “L’ invention de l’ Afrique dans le Candomblé du Brésil,” *Storia, antropologia e scienze del linguaggio*, 9:2-3 (1994), pp. 65-85; Matory, “English Professors,” p. 78-79.
- ^{xx} Interview with Antonio Olinto, May 26, 2006. [“Ela se apaixonou pela Mãe Senhora”].
- ^{xxi} Zora Seljan, *No Brasil, ainda tem gente da minha cor?* Salvador: Prefeitura da Cidade de Salvador, 1978, p. 27.
- ^{xxii} Zora Seljan to Pierre Verger, (undated, probably 1955), Correspondência, *FPV*.
- ^{xxiii} Zora Seljan to Pierre Verger, (undated, probably 1955), Correspondência, *FPV*.
- ^{xxiv} Zora Seljan to Pierre Verger, (undated, probably 1955), Correspondência, *FPV*.
- ^{xxv} Interview with Antonio Olinto, May 26, 2006.
- ^{xxvi} Interview with Antonio Olinto, May 26, 2006.
- ^{xxvii} Interview with Antonio Olinto, June 14, 2006.
- ^{xxviii} Interview with Antonio Olinto, June 14, 2006.
- ^{xxix} Pierre Verger to Vivaldo Costa Lima (Ogundeyi), November 25, 1961. Pasta Correspondência com Vivaldo Costa Lima, *FPV*.
- ^{xxx} Olinto, *Brasileiros na África*, p. 271.
- ^{xxxi} Olinto, *Brasileiros na África*, p. 55. [“Para o Brasil, de vocação atlântico-tropical por exelência, a exata compreensão do que ocorre na África é de máxima importância. Nenhum outro país pode, como o nosso, entender os acertos e desajustes da nova África.”]
- ^{xxxii} “Programa de trabalho da Secretaria Geral Adjunta para a África e Oriente próximo,” March 1, 1968. Dispatch 35, Embassy in Lagos to Foreign Ministry, *AHI*.
- ^{xxxiii} CACEX, *Comércio Exterior, 1974*, Vol. 1. Rio de Janeiro: Banco do Brasil, Carteira de Comércio Exterior, 1975, pp. 30-33.
- ^{xxxiv} “Good Jim Quits,” *The Daily Times*, January 10, 1963. “Remessa de recortes de jornal. James Meredith,” January 10, 1963. Dispatch 6, Embassy in Lagos to Foreign Ministry, *AHI*.
- ^{xxxv} “Remessa de recortes de jornal. James Meredith,” January 10, 1963. Dispatch 6, Embassy in Lagos to Foreign Ministry, *AHI*. [“o Brasil é colocado numa posição extremamente simpática perante a opinião pública nigeriana.”]
- ^{xxxvi} “Influência da cultura brasileira no Daomé,” January 28, 1963. Dispatch 18, Embassy in Lagos to Foreign Ministry, *AHI*.
- ^{xxxvii} Olinto, *Brasileiros na África*, p. 192.
- ^{xxxviii} Olinto, *Brasileiros na África*, p. 180.
- ^{xxxix} Olinto, *Brasileiros na África*, p. 189.
- ^{xl} Zora Seljan, “Brazilian Artists,” *Lagos this Week*, May 19-25, 1963, p. 8.
- ^{xli} “Exposição de artistas brasileiros contemporâneos.” June 3, 1963. Dispatch 99, Embassy in Lagos to Foreign Ministry, *AHI*.
- ^{xlii} Zora Seljan, “Brazilian Artists,” *Lagos This Week*, May 19-25, 1963. “Exposição de artistas brasileiros contemporâneos.” June 3, 1963. Dispatch 99, Embassy in Lagos to Foreign Ministry, *AHI*.
- ^{xliii} “Brazilian Artists,” *Morning Post*, May 20, 1963. “Exposição de artistas brasileiros contemporâneos. Remessa de recortes de jornal.” June 3, 1963. Dispatch 100, Embassy in Lagos to Foreign Ministry, *AHI*.
- ^{xliv} “Brazilian Arts Exhibition Opened,” *The Independent*, May 25-June 1, 1963. “Exposição de artistas brasileiros contemporâneos.” June 3, 1963. Dispatch 99, Embassy in Lagos to Foreign Ministry, *AHI*.

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- ^{xlv} “Brazilian Arts Exhibition Opened,” *The Independent*, May 25-June 1, 1963; Zora Seljan, “Brazilian Artists,” *Lagos This Week*, May 19-25, 1963. “Exposição de artistas brasileiros contemporâneos.” June 3, 1963. Dispatch 99, Embassy in Lagos to Foreign Ministry, *AHI*.
- ^{xlvi} John Rover, “Culture- Brazilians took this from us,” *Sunday Times*, May 5, 1963. Dispatch 78, Antônio Tavares to Hermes Lima, June 3, 1963, “Exposição de artistas brasileiros.” Dispatch 78, Embassy in Lagos to Foreign Ministry, *AHI*.
- ^{xlvii} Interview with Antonio Olinto, May 26, 2006. Quadros named black journalist and presidential aide Raymundo Souza Dantas ambassador to Ghana in 1961.
- ^{xlviii} Interview with Antonio Olinto, May 26, 2006.
- ^{xliv} Interview with Antonio Olinto, June 14, 2006.
- ^l Interview with Antonio Olinto, June 14, 2006.
- ^{li} Interview with Antonio Olinto, June 14, 2006.
- ^{lii} “Olympic Champ Turns Diplomat,” *Morning Post*, March 5, 1964. “Recortes de jornais com notícias sobre o Brasil.” March 17, 1964. Dispatch 62, Embassy in Lagos to Foreign Ministry, *AHI*.
- ^{liii} “Relatório anual do Adido Cultural em Lagos,” March 19, 1965. Dispatch 68, Embassy in Lagos to Foreign Ministry, *AHI*. [“”Senhor da Silva, seja bem vindo. Eu também estava presente aquela tarde no Estádio de Helsinki, quando o senhor maravilhou a multidão com seus saltos. Espero que com sua presença entre nós, a Nigéria venha a ter também o seu da Silva.”]
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- ^{lv} “Relatório anual do Adido Cultural em Lagos,” March 19, 1965. Dispatch 68, Embassy in Lagos to Foreign Ministry, *AHI*.
- ^{lvi} “Relatório sobre a divulgação de música brasileira no exterior.” August 20, 1964. Dispatch 150. Embassy in Lagos to Foreign Ministry, *AHI*.
- ^{lvii} Meira Penna to Foreign Minister Araújo Castro, January 15, 1964, “Entrega de credenciais.” Dispatch 12, Embassy in Lagos to Foreign Ministry, *AHI*.
- ^{lviii} Meira Penna to Foreign Minister Araújo Castro, January 15, 1964, “Entrega de credenciais.” “Brazil, ‘a laboratory of inter-racial cooperation.’ - envoy told,” *West African Pilot*, January 14, 1964, p. 1. Dispatch 12, Embassy in Lagos to Foreign Ministry, *AHI*.
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- ^{lx} José Osvaldo Meira Penna, “Visita oficial à Região Ocidental da Nigéria.” May 26, 1964. Dispatch 106, Embassy in Lagos to Foreign Ministry, *AHI*.
- ^{lxi} “Viagem de ator brasileiro com apresentação de filmes. ‘Ganga Zumba,’” November 13, 1964. Dispatch 188, Embassy in Lagos to Foreign Ministry, *AHI*.
- ^{lxii} “A Lei de Parkinson e a Embaixada em Lagos.” March 5, 1965, Dispatch 63, Embassy in Lagos to Foreign Ministry, *AHI*.
- ^{lxiii} “A Lei de Parkinson e a Embaixada em Lagos.” March 5, 1965, Dispatch 63, Embassy in Lagos to Foreign Ministry, *AHI*.
- ^{lxiv} “A Lei de Parkinson e a Embaixada em Lagos.” March 5, 1965, Dispatch 63, Embassy in Lagos to Foreign Ministry, *AHI*.
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- ^{lxvii} “Acontecimentos políticos no Brasil. Repercussões na Nigéria.” May 12, 1964. Dispatch 99, Embassy in Lagos to Foreign Ministry, *AHI*.
- ^{lxviii} Interview with José Maria Pereira, May 27, 2006.
- ^{lix} Interviews with Antonio Olinto, May 26, 2006 and June 14, 2006.
- ^{lxx} “Programa de trabalho da Secretaria Geral Adjunta para a África e Oriente próximo,” March 1, 1968. Dispatch 35, Embassy in Lagos to Foreign Ministry, *AHI*.
- ^{lxxi} “Programa de trabalho da Secretaria Geral Adjunta para a África e Oriente próximo,” March 1, 1968. Dispatch 35, Embassy in Lagos to Foreign Ministry, *AHI*.
- ^{lxxii} “Atividades culturais.” November 30, 1968. Dispatch 153. Embassy in Lagos to Foreign Ministry, *AHI*.
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- ^{lxxiv} “O Brasil na rádio nigeriana. Programa de Natal.” January 5, 1966. Dispatch 6, Embassy in Lagos to Foreign Ministry, *AHI*.
- ^{lxxv} Adhemar Ferreira da Silva, “Relatório de viagem.” January 3, 1966. Dispatch 1, Embassy in Lagos to Foreign Ministry, *AHI*.
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