Critical Historiography

Afro-Catholic Baptism and The Articulation of a Merchant Community, Agoué 1840–1860

Luis Nicolau Parés

Abstract: This paper analyzes the "Southern" Afro-Brazilian Catholicism which was brought to West Africa by former slaves from Brazil prior to the expansion of the "Northern" European Catholic missions. In examining two significant mass baptisms held in the town of Agoué in 1846 and 1855, this paper explores the religious history of the Aguda or Afro-Brazilian freed slaves, and how they built a network of ethnic, commercial, and affective relationships by means of Catholic baptism and godparenting. The Aguda's Catholic affiliation (rather than conversion), beyond being coextensive with Brazilian identity, served to produce a merchant community whose main activity, in the early period, was the slave trade. The paper also discusses the methodological potential of cross referencing and fertilizing West African data with Bahian data in order to elucidate how the returnees' appropriation of Catholic ritual was shaped by their previous Brazilian experience.

Résumé: Cet article analyse le catholicisme afro-brésilien du "sud" apporté en Afrique de l'ouest par les anciens esclaves brésiliens avant même l'expansion des missions catholiques du "nord" venues d'Europe. Grâce à l'étude de deux baptêmes en masse effectués dans la ville d'Agoué en 1846 et 1855, cet article explore à la fois l'histoire religieuse des Agudas, les anciens esclaves afro-brésiliens, et la construction de leur réseau de relations ethniques, commerciales et personnelles à travers le baptême catholique et

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le parrainage religieux. L'affiliation catholique des Agudas (plus que leur conversion) co-existante à leur identité brésilienne, a contribué à la création d'une communauté de marchands dont l'activité principale était, dans ses premières années, la traite des esclaves. Ce papier se penche aussi sur le potentiel méthodologique de croiser les sources ouest-africaines et celles de Bahia afin d'éclairer la manière dont les Agudas se sont appropriés un rituel catholique façonné par leur expérience brésilienne.

Introduction[1]

This paper examines the Atlantic migratory movement of return which occurred in the 1830s and 1840s, led by former slaves from Brazil who settled in Agoué, Ouidah, Porto Novo, and Lagos in the present-day Republic of Benin and in Nigeria. In those and other coastal cities the freed African returnees and their children joined Portuguese and Brazilian merchants and their mixed-race descendants and aggregates who had been there for decades. The resulting social formation, referred to as either the Portuguese, Brazilian, or Aguda community, in most cases assumed Catholicism as a critical mark of identity and distinction. Although the narrative of Jesus's Passion and Redemption might have resonated with the experience of emancipation of anyone who escaped the sufferings of slavery, Catholic affiliation did not necessary translate into an anti-slavery discourse. On the contrary, many of the leaders of the return movement, although themselves former slaves, were deeply involved in the local and long distance Atlantic slave trade.

A central character in this story is the freed African Joaquim d'Almeida, a well-known figure in Aguda literature and in the historiography of the illegal slave trade in West Africa.[2] In Bahia, Joaquim had been a member

[1] This paper is the result of an ongoing research project entitled *Religious Affiliations, Identities and Social Networks: Freed Africans between Bahia and Dahomey (1790–1890)*, funded by the Brazilian National Research Council (CNPq). I am grateful to Lisa Earl Castillo for reading and commenting on an earlier version of the text; and to Silke Strickrodt, Kristin Mann, and an anonymous reviewer of this journal for their perspicacious observations and suggestions. A preliminary version of the text was presented at the conference Crossroads in African Studies, held at the Centre of West African Studies in the University of Birmingham, 4–6 September 2013.

[2] Pierre Verger published Joaquim's will and dedicated some pages of two of his books to him: Pierre Verger, *Os libertos: sete caminhos na liberdade de escravos* (Salvador: Corrupio, 1992), 43–48, 116–121; Pierre Verger, *Fluxo e refluxo do tráfico de escravos entre o Golfo do Benin e a Bahia de Todos os Santos* (São Paulo: Corrupio, 1987 [1968]), 473, 527, 537–539. Other data about his whereabouts and activities in West Africa: Jerry M. Turner, "Les Brésiliens: The Impact of Former Brazilian Slaves Upon Dahomey," PhD dissertation, Boston University (Boston, 1975), 102–105; Robin Law, *Ouidah: The Social History of a West African Slaving Port, 1727–1892* (Oxford: James Currey, 2004), 199–201; Silke Strickrodt, "'Afro-Brazilians' of the Western Slave Coast in the Nineteenth Century," in: José C. Curto and Paul E. Lovejoy (eds.), *Enslaving Connections: Changing Cultures of Africa and Brazil during the Era of Slavery* (Amherst NY: Humanity Books, 2004), 213–244, 221, 225–228.

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of the Catholic brotherhood of *Nosso Senhor Bom Jesus das Necessidades e Redempção* ("Our Lord Good Jesus of the Necessities and Redemption"). After his return to West Africa he built a chapel in his family compound at Agoué, and named it after the brotherhood.[3] When in the 1860s and early 1870s the missionaries of the French *Société des Missions Africaines* visited Agoué they were quite impressed to see a Catholic chapel there.[4] For this reason, up to today Joaquim's descendants commemorate him as the introducer of Catholicism to the region.

To examine the nature of the Aguda's Catholic affiliation (rather than conversion) this paper examines three significant collective baptisms held in Agoué in 1846, 1855, and 1857. The ceremonies themselves were conducted by black priests who had been appointed at the Portuguese fort in the neighboring town of Ouidah. These social events preceded the arrival in Dahomey of the first white priests of the Société des Missions Africaines in 1861. This paper therefore aims to shed light on the "Southern" Lusotropical Catholicism which was brought to West Africa by Afro-Brazilian returnees prior to the expansion of the "Northern" European Catholic missions.[5] One of the main arguments here will be that Catholic affiliation, beyond being coextensive with Brazilian identity, as posited by Manuela Carneiro da Cunha, also served to articulate the association of a merchant community whose main activity, in the early period, was the trafficking of human bodies.[6]

[3] The city of Salvador in Bahia was one of the main ports of arrival of slaves in the Americas and the principal point of embarkation for freed Africans returning to West Africa in the nineteenth century.

[4] The first mention of the chapel was made by father Lafitte who was in Agoué in 1862, though he published his book only later. A few months after, in February 1863, Father Borghero visited Agoué and baptized a few individuals; he too referred to the chapel. Father Thillier visited Agoué in April 1870 and August–September 1871 (also quoted by Laffite, *Au pays*, 49–50). Father Bouche, who gives the more detailed narrative, was in Agoué in 1874. See: (Abbé) Laffite, *Le Pays des Nègres et la Côte des Esclaves* (Tours: Alfred Mame et fils éditeurs, 1876), 45; Francesco Borghero, *Journal de Francesco Borghero, premier missionnaire du Dahomey (1861–1865)* (Renzo Mandirola and Yves Morel [eds.]) (Paris: Karthala, 1997), 123, 251; (Father) Thillier, "Lettre de M. Thillier, missionnaire apostolique, à M. Planque, Supérieur de la Société des Missions Africaines, Lyon, mars 1872," *Annales de la Propagation de la Foi* 44 (1872), 264–270, 267; (Abbé) Pierre Bertrand Bouche, *Sept ans en Afrique occidentale: La Côte des Esclaves et Dahomey* (Paris: E. Plon, Nourrit et Cie. Imprimeurs-Éditeurs, 1885), 266–267.

[5] For the concepts of Lusotropicalism and Lusotropie applied to the Aguda, see: Olabiyi Babalola Yai, "The Identity, Contributions and Ideology of the Aguda (Afro-Brazilians) of the Gulf of Benin: A Reinterpretation," in: Kristin Mann and Edna G. Bay (eds.), *Rethinking the African Diaspora: The Making of a Black Atlantic World in the Bight of Benin and Brazil* (London: Frank Cass, 2001) 72–82, 74.

[6] Manuela Carneiro Cunha, *Negros estrangeiros: os escravos libertos e sua volta à África* (São Paulo: Companhia das Letras, 2012).

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This paper is mainly interpretative, but the empirical evidence on which its main argument rests is the result of research from a wide range of sources. Passport, notary, judicial, and police records were consulted in the Bahian archives, while ecclesiastical records were checked online.[7] In this process I uncovered new historical data about Joaquim d'Almeida and the Redemption brotherhood so that I can now fix a far more accurate context for his biographical details and "missionization" project.[8] As for the West African sources, aside from the British Slave Trade Correspondence and existing published material, I examined early Catholic baptism records in Agoué and Ouidah. Particularly valuable for this paper was a baptism book dated 1846–1874 and kept at the Agoué Parish Archives.[9] Other authors have mentioned the same source and made reference to the 1855 ceremony when Joaquim baptized twenty-three of his children and seventy-two

[7] I consulted archives of ecclesiastical records (Brazil, Bahia, Catholic Church Records, 1598–2007) via https://familysearch.org/; the site FamilySearch is run by the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints.

[8] I thank Lisa Earl Castillo for sharing several ecclesiastical and civil records about Joaquim d'Almeida which she found in the Bahian archives and in the web resources. This collaboration, together with the participation of professor Elisée Soumonni in Benin, was developed within the context of the research project "Atlantic Families, Networks of Sociability between Bahia and Benin," funded by CNPq between 2012 and 2013. For the Redemption brotherhood, see: Luis Nicolau Parés, "Militiamen, Barbers and Slave-Traders: Mina and Jeje Africans in a Catholic Brotherhood (Bahia, 1770–1830)," *Revista Tempo* 20 (2014), 1–32.

[9] Agoué Parish Archives (Archives de la Paroisse Sacré Cœur d'Agoué. Diocèse de Lokossa, Benin), Baptism Book 1, 1846–1874. This is a French translation of an original book written in Latin. Its calligraphy is very similar to that of Father Isidore Pélofy, who lived and worked at the Catholic Mission in Agoué from 1911 to 1945. I thank Marina d'Almeida, Achille Massougbodji, and Father Antonin for mediating and allowing me access to this material during a visit I made to Agoué in January 2010, in the context of a SEPHIS Lecture Tour coordinated by professor Elisée Soumonni. Though the oldest baptism record in this book is dated 1846, Roberto Pazzi claimed to have seen a book with a first Agoué record dated on 17 April 1844, followed by others in October 1844 and January 1845: Roberto Pazzi, *Introduction à l'histoire de l'aïre culturelle ajatado* (Lomé: Université du Bénin, Institut National des Sciences Humaines, 1979), 90. Perhaps those records were in the Ouidah books. Simone de Souza refers to baptismal records from Ouidah dated 1821, 1842, 1845, and throughout the 1850s: Simone de Souza, *La Famille de Souza du Bénin-Togo* (Cotonou: Les Éditions du Bénin, 1992), 273. The early Ouidah baptism records I have had access to start in 1828, but up to 1861 they only give the year and first name of the baptized person: Archives of the Société des Missions Africaines, Rome, 2H–50, "Liber Baptismalis Ajudae."

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female slaves.[10] However, until now there has been no proper close analysis of the political and economic subtext of those ritual celebrations. The paper also wants to test the methodological potential of cross referencing and fertilizing the West African data with the Bahian data to elicit new meanings of the Aguda Catholic "devotion."

In sum, by examining the Africans' strategic appropriation of Catholic rituals in the making of a "community of trust and shared interests" at a time when there was yet no significant interference by European missionaries, this paper aims to throw our understanding of the local embedding of Christianity in Africa into sharper relief.[11] It is hoped that the analysis of new documentary sources and the paper's transatlantic methodological approach will advance knowledge of the religious history of the Aguda and how the freed slaves were able to construct a network of ethnic, commercial, and affective relationships by means of Catholic baptism, godparenting, and other cultural practices they carried with them from Brazil to West Africa.

The Bahian Background of Joaquim d'Almeida

I propose to use Joaquim's biography as both starting point and guide for this narrative. According to a family *oriki* collected in the 1950s, Joaquim d'Almeida was originally from the Azima people from Tovoh-Gbôvi-Haya, in the Mahi mountain region north of Abomey.[12] He was probably enslaved during the reign of the Dahomean king Adandozan prior to 1818, and purchased by the Pernambucan Manoel Joaquim d'Almeida, a mixed-race sea captain and prosperous slaver living in Bahia.[13] As an African enslaved by the Dahomean he was identified in Bahia as belonging to the Jeje nation. Joaquim worked for several years with his master as his trusted servant and probably sailed with him as an interpreter, until buying his freedom in 1830.[14]

[10] Régina Byll-Cataria, *Histoire d'Agoué (République du Bénin) par le Révérend Pére Isodore Pélofy* (Leipzig: Institut für Afrikanistik, 2002), 13; J. Pierucci, "Agoué. Village de liberté, de l'origine en [sic] 1953," typescript (48 pages), edited by Telemark (1953), 15. I thank Elisée Soumonni for providing me with a xerox copy of a xerox copy of this document. Verger, *Os libertos*, 46.

[11] This sentence is inspired by the comments of two of my reviewers. In particular, the expression in brackets is from Kristin Mann.

[12] Casimir Agbo, *Histoire de Ouidah du XVI au XX siècle* (Avignon: Les Presses Universelles, 1959), 275. Later sources name Hoko as his birth place: Verger, *Fluxo*, 473.

[13] There is a baptism record, dated 4 September 1814, of a "Joaquim, slave of Manoel Joaquim," in the Santo Antônio parish where both Almeidas once lived: https://familysearch.org/: Brazil, Bahia, Catholic Church Records, 1598–2007, Santo Antônio, "Baptisms 1812–1821," f. 86v.

[14] Arquivo Publico do Estado da Bahia, Judiciário, Livro de Notas 233, f. 80. I thank Lisa Earl Castillo for providing a copy of this document. The manumission letter says that Joaquim was a slave of "língua geral," which can be read either as him being an interpreter (*língua*) or simply a speaker of the *língua franca* spoken on the Mina Coast.

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He lived in the Santo Antônio parish in Salvador, where he had a lodge selling soap, fish, and other commodities, although that did not prevent him from being continuously involved in the illegal slave trade.[15] We should not forget that since 1815 there had been a Brazilian law forbidding slave trading north of the Equator, and in 1831 another law was passed forbidding it throughout the Atlantic and prescribing punishment for slavers. Nonetheless, Joaquim made several trips to Africa in the 1830s, some of them allegedly to Central Africa, although Central Africa might have been mentioned as cover for his true destination on the Mina Coast.[16]

For instance, on 27 October 1835, nine months after the famous Malé revolt in Bahia, Joaquim applied for a passport to Benguela, with a stop in Luanda. The same day, and the day before, similar requests were made by other Jeje freedmen who were close friends of Joaquim, among them José Pereira da Paixão and Antônio Caetano Coelho, both of whom subsequently turned up in Agoué.[17] The chronology of this alleged trip tends to corroborate the Almeida family tradition which has it that Joaquim first arrived at Agoué in 1835, leading a group of returnees, or "first settlers."[18] Yet, if the trip ever actually happened, it must have been a very short one, because on 6 November 1835 Joaquim was still in Bahia – acting as godfather to a son of the Jeje Benedicto Fernandes Galiza and the Haussa Henriqueta Maria[19] – and four months later, on 7 March 1836, he was applying for a new passport to the Ports of Africa.[20] This second trip certainly happened,

[15] Arquivo Público do Estado da Bahia, Judiciário, Processo Crime, Salvador 4/128/3 (1834) "Joaquim d'Almeida e escravo Cipriano," f. 9v. This process is mentioned by Jaime Rodrigues, though he seems to be unaware of Joaquim d'Almeida's identity. See: Jaime Rodrigues, *O infame comercio. Propostas e experiências no final do tráfico de africanos para o Brasil (1800–1850)* (Campinas: Editora da Unicamp, 2000), 195–199, 206. I thank Lisa Earl Castillo for calling my attention on this reference.

[16] Verger, *Fluxo*, 405–419.

[17] Arquivo Público do Estado da Bahia, Polícia, maço 5883, "Registro de Passaportes 1834–1837," f. 115–115v. This book was transcribed by Lisa Earl Castillo and Emanuelle Maia Moreira within the context of the *Atlantic Families* project. The Jeje Antônio Caetano Coelho also appears on the Bahian authorities' 1835 deportation list following the Malé revolt.

[18] This tradition is recorded in a book from the Agoué mission school: Agoué Parish Archives, École de la Mission Catholique d'Agoué, 1874–1914, f. 1.

[19] https://familysearch.org/: Brazil, Bahia, Catholic Church Records, 1598–2007, Santo Antônio, "Baptisms 1828–1840," f. 259v. I thank Lisa Earl Castillo for sharing the references of this book. The ethnicity information is provided in Joaquim's will.

[20] Arquivo Público do Estado da Bahia, Polícia, maço 5883, "Registro de Passaportes 1834–1837," f. 142v. A week before (20 February 1836) Pedro Pinto da Silveira (Pedro Codjo), the "godchild" of Andre Pinto da Silveira, a well-known slave trader, friend to Joaquim's ex-master, applied for another passport to the Coast of Africa.

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for in November the same year Joaquim was acting as godfather to another son of Galiza and Henriqueta, but this time by means of a procurator, which shows that he was absent from Bahia.[21]

Joaquim d'Almeida's presence at Agoué is first documented only sometime in 1839 or 1840. The papers apprehended by the Royal Navy in November 1840, belonging to the freed Angola Tobias Barretto Brandão, reveal that he had been involved in the slave trade for the *previous two years*, and had traded at Agoué [Agui] with Joaquim d'Almeida and Antônio Caetano Coelho.[22] In September 1841 Joaquim was in Ouidah with his partner Coelho, as attested by the letter of his friend and *compadre* Galiza, who asked him to send "pieces of cloth" (*panos*), probably a coded expression to refer to slaves.[23] Joaquim returned to Bahia, however, sometime after September 1842.[24]

By the end of 1844, Almeida had once more sailed to West Africa, but this time he apparently intended to stay for good, since a few days before departure, on 17 December 1844, he asked his friend, the Creole Guilherme Martins do Nascimento, to draw up a will for him. The will tells us the extent of Joaquim's wealth at the time; apart from two houses and nine domestic slaves in Bahia, he owned the value of thirty-six captives in Havana and twenty more in Pernambuco. His main commercial partners in Bahia were his ex-master and later patron Manoel Joaquim d'Almeida, and the influential merchant Joaquim Alves da Cruz Rios who was commissioned to receive the value of twenty of the Havana slaves and all those in Pernambuco. Joaquim also owned the profits of an eighth of a shipload dispatched to Africa a few months earlier and a quarter of the cargo in the brig *Emilia* in which he was to embark of *cachaça* (spirits), tobacco, and cloth valued at seven *contos de rei*.[25] He was to underwrite this latter venture

[21] https://familysearch.org/: Brazil, Bahia, Catholic Church Records, 1598–2007, Santo Antônio, "Baptisms 1828–1840," f. 299.

[22] House of Commons Parliamentary Papers, Slave Trade Papers, 1841, Class A, number 109, "Case of the Brazilian schooner *Gratidão*," 115–118 (also quoted in: Strickrodt, "Afro-Brazilians," 225; Law, *Ouidah*, 199). The other slavers referred to in Brandão's letters were Elias Domingo de Carvalho, Seçar Medair, and Antônio Vieira dos Santos.

[23] House of Commons Parliamentary Papers, Slave Trade Papers, 1842, Class C, incl. 13 in number 24, "Traduction des lettres portugaises," letter 9, "Benedito Fernandes Galiza à M. Joaquim d'Almeida, Bahia, 24 September 1841," 28.

[24] Arquivo Público do Estado da Bahia, Judiciário, Livro de Testamentos 29, "Testamento de Quiteria Nunes de Jesus," f. 143. As first executor of the will, Joaquim d'Almeida is said to be absent in September 1842, but "will soon arrive."

[25] Arquivo Público do Estado da Bahia, Judiciário, 04/1445/1914/05, "Inventário de Joaquim d'Almeida," 1857–1865, ff. 3–9. I thank Lisa Earl Castillo for sharing the reference to this document. *Correio Mercantil*, 20 December 1844, 4. For the will, see also note 2.

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himself in Africa, while Cruz Rios would do the same in Bahia. Altogether we can estimate his fortune at approximately 40 *contos de rei*, which would place him among the top 15% of the richest men in Bahia.[26]

Joaquim's partner in Cuba was José Maria de Moura, who was linked to some of the most powerful Brazilian slavers such as Domingos José Martins and Joaquim Pereira Marinho. It is worth noting that during the illegal slave trade period Bahian and Portuguese merchants resorted to the triangular route of Havana-Bahia-Onim (Lagos) to conduct their business, with the participation of North American and British capital too.[27] Their boats sailed under the Spanish flag from Havana to Bahia where they loaded *cachaça* and tobacco, commodities exchanged in West Africa for slaves who were then sold in Cuba.[28] Joaquim d'Almeida's fortune in the early 1840s came from his participation in this global Atlantic capitalistic enterprise, and his extraordinary ability as an African to penetrate the exclusive circle of white and mixed-race investors who controlled it.

At the peak of his career, perhaps sensing and reacting to the increasing difficulties the illegal slave trade was facing in Brazil, Almeida, together with his friend Guilherme Martins do Nascimento, must have arrived to West Africa in early 1845.[29] It is uncertain whether he established himself in Agoué immediately, in what would be his own quarter called Zokikome ("Zoki" being a short form for Joaquim and *kome* meaning neighborhood),[30] or whether for some time he operated both there and in neighboring Ouidah. It is also uncertain exactly when he built his famous chapel, but before we address that question let us first examine the political situation in Agoué.

[26] Based on an average price of 487 *mil reis* per slave: Kátia M. de Queirós Mattoso, Herbert S. Klein and Stanley L. Engerman, "Notas sobre as tendências e padrões dos preços de alforrias na Bahia, 1819–1888," in: João Reis (ed.), *Escravidão e a invenção da liberdade: Estudos sobre o negro no Brasil* (São Paulo: Editora Brasilense, 1988), 60–72, 66; Kátia M. de Queirós Mattoso, *Bahia: século XIX – uma província no Império* (Rio de Janeiro: Nova Fronteira, 1992), 607.

[27] Ana Amélia Viera Nascimento, *Dez freguesias da cidade de Salvador, aspectos sociais e urbanos do século XIX* (Salvador: EDUFBA, 2007), 323. Documents of the same period suggest the cooperation of African slavers in Bahia with Jewish creditors in Rio de Janeiro too: Arquivo Público do Estado da Bahia, Judiciário, Livro de Testamentos 28, "Testamento de Luis de Campos Souza," 1841, f. 189ss.

[28] See, for instance: House of Commons Parliamentary Papers, Slave Trade Papers, 1836, Class B, number 107, "Case of the schooner *Três Manoelas*," 89, 97–101.

[29] Arquivo Público do Estado da Bahia, Polícia, maço 5887, "Registro de Passaportes 1844–1845," ff. 213, 234; Arquivo Público do Estado da Bahia, Judiciário, 04/1445/1914/05, "Inventário de Joaquim d'Almeida," 1857–1865, ff. 3–9.

[30] He was also known as Zoki Azata. Zoki = Joaquim, Azata = "qui porte un grand chapeau de paille" (Byll-Cataria, *Histoire*, 1).

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Agoué's Portuguese Town, the Catholic Chapel, and the 1846 Collective Baptism

The town of Agoué, lying between the sea and the lagoon and on the border between present day Benin and Togo, is said to have been founded in the early 1820s by the losing side in a civil war which broke out in the neighboring town of Aneho (Little Popo). The political history of nineteenth century Agoué has been analyzed in detail by Silke Strickrodt, and the data of the first part of this section – intended to provide the context of my argumentation – is mainly taken from her work.[31] Local history reports that Brazilian returnees had begun to arrive in Agoué by 1835 and it is generally assumed that this was mainly due to the aftermath of the Malé rebellion in Bahia. However, there is evidence from as early as 1831 of architectural influence from Brazil in the form of two two-story houses, and there was at least one significant individual who spoke Portuguese and had lived in Bahia for some time.[32]

In 1843, Agoué was described as a "second class town" with approximately 1,500 or 1,600 inhabitants.[33] After the death of its head chief by September that year, the town was ruled by five "minor Chiefs being on terms of equality."[34] Despite such an appearance of political decentralization, when sending letters to the British authorities, the first two chiefs to

[31] Silke Strickrodt, *Afro-European Trade in the Atlantic World: The Western Slave Coast, c.1550–c.1885* (Suffolk/Rochester NY: James Currey, 2015), particularly chapter 5. Bouche dates the foundation of Agoué to 1821: Bouche, *Sept ans*, 266. Pélofy follows him, but Père Thollon dates it to 1823: Byll-Cataria, *Histoire*, 5 note 9, 6. Strickrodt presents contemporary documents showing that the Aneho civil conflict reached its peak in 1823, but also that the original settlement might have been older: Strickrodt, *Afro-European Trade*, 157–159, 166.

[32] C.H. van Zütphen, *Tagebuch einer Reise von Bahia nach Afrika* (Düsseldorf: J.H.E. Schreiner, 1835), 52–58. I thank Silke Strickrodt for calling my attention on this record and for providing a transcript of its contents. For more details see Strickrodt, *Afro-European Trade*, 167–169. For the different oral traditions regarding the first settlement of returnees in Agoué: Strickrodt, "Afro-Brazilians," 225–226.

[33] Strickrodt, *Afro-European Trade*, 176 (citing: Wesleyan Methodist Missionary Society Archive, London: Special Series Biographical, West Africa: Papers of Thomas Birch Freeman: T.B. Freeman, "Journal December 1842–December 1845," 164–166). In the early 1870s, Bouche estimates Agoué's population at 6,000: Bouche, *Sept ans*, 301. For other demographic estimates: Strickrodt, "Afro-Brazilians," 215. For the succession of Agoué rulers, see: Bouche, *Sept ans*, 302; Byll-Cataria, *Histoire*, 5–7; Pierucci, "Agoué," 6.

[34] Strickrodt, *Afro-European Trade*, 177 (citing: The National Archives, Kew, CO96/4, incl. 7 in number 8: Gov. Hill, Cape Coast Castle, 21 March 1844; John Quarvee, Ahguay, 28 December 1843). The sense of political decentralization persisted in 1850, when Agoué is described as a "republic (…) ruled by a senate, with no direct head," in: Frederick E. Forbes, *Dahomey and the Dahomans*, volume 1 (London: Frank Cass, 1966 [1851]), 102. See also: Bouche, *Sept ans*, 302.

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sign were the *cabboccer*, or headman of the "English Town," and the "acting *cabboccer*" of the "Portuguese Town," the latter probably the successor of the late head chief.[35] Strickrodt has persuasively suggested that the alleged autonomy and power of the "English Town" was perhaps more a reflection of the political aspirations of the English *cabboccer* than a reality. However, his aspirations, together with the existence of distinct named quarters and the rumors of a turbulent contest for the election of a new head chief, indicate that the town was to some extent divided "into two parts," or parties.[36] The English town was established around the British Hutton's palm oil factory and the Saro (or Salo) neighborhood where English-speaking returnees from Sierra Leone had settled.[37] Many of the Saro were converts to the Methodist faith and in the mid-1850s they supported the expansion of the Wesleyan Methodist Missionary Society at Little Popo, Glidji, and Agoué.[38]

On the other hand the "Portuguese town" was inhabited by Mahi, Fon, Nago, Hausa, and Creole Brazilian returnees distributed in various quarters (*kome*): Zokikome (Fon, Creole), Fonkome (Fon, Mahi, Nago), Diata or Idi-Ata (Nago) and Hausakome (Hausa, Nago, Mahi).[39] Portuguese, Brazilian, and Spanish slave traders from Ouidah and other coastal towns had settled there too, particularly after the implementation of the Equipment Act in 1839.[40] In the 1840s this cosmopolitan "Portuguese town" might have been under the influence of the Bahian slave trader Francisco Felix de Souza

[35] Strickrodt, *Afro-European Trade*, 177 (citing: The National Archives, Kew, CO96/2, incl. in Thomas Hutton, Cape Coast, 24 October 1843; Chiefs of Ahguay, Ahguay, 8 October 1843. According to this document the "acting *cabboccer* of Portuguese Town" was Philip Decorsa, a phonetic variation of Felipe da Costa, while John Quarvil, is named as the *cabboccer* of the English Town.

[36] Strickrodt, *Afro-European Trade*, 177–178.

[37] Hutton's factory lay "on the south-side of the town, facing the sea, distant half a mile, over a bed of loose dry sand," according to: John Duncan, *Travels in Western Africa in 1845–1846*, 2 volumes (London: Frank Cass, 1968 [1847]), volume 1, 91. Yet, in 1859, a missionary noted that the Saro had "located themselves in different parts of Ahguay" (Wesleyan Methodist Missionary Society Archive, London: William West, Cape Coast, 6 June 1859). Both pieces of evidence are cited in: Strickrodt, *Afro-European Trade*, 178–179.

[38] In 1854 they opened a school in Little Popo and they intended to open another in 1855 in Heve, close to Grand Popo: Strickrodt, *Afro-European Trade*, 175–176, 205 (citing: Wesleyan Methodist Missionary Society Archive, London: West Africa Correspondence, Box 262, Joseph Dawson, Little Popo, 23 February 1855).

[39] Pierucci, "Agoué," 7–9; Strickrodt, "Afro-Brazilians," 226. Later, Iyakome was founded by Iya Modukpe, including the neighboring quarters of Adjêtêdo and Hêtountoun mostly inhabited by her Yoruba slaves.

[40] The Equipment Act of 1839 allowed the British Royal Navy to capture Portuguese ships under suspicion of engagement in the slave trade: Strickrodt, "Afro-Brazilians," 213, 218.

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who lived in Ouidah, but in any case, after de Souza's death in 1849, Joaquim d'Almeida became the dominant figure.[41]

The Nago and Hausa returnees built two mosques, one in Diata and the other in Hausakome, although we do not know exactly when. The Muslim quarter is mentioned by Bouche, but he says nothing about a mosque.[42] As we shall see, their affiliation to Islam did not prevent the Nago and Hausa from participating in Catholic baptisms nor from socializing and even inter-marrying with other Portuguese-speaking Fon, Mahi, and Creole returnees. The Mahi on the other hand had a reputation for engaging in vodun practices, as most Agoué families probably did.[43] However, despite such religious pluralism, Catholicism was the most visible religious stamp on the Portuguese town.[44]

Simplifying what was certainly a much more intricate social dynamic, there are grounds for suggesting the town became politically polarized into an English-speaking Protestant community, and a Portuguese-speaking Catholic one. British sources show a tendency to characterize the former group as taking part in legitimate trade, predominantly in ivory and palm oil, and to denounce the Portuguese as being involved in the illicit but very lucrative slave trade. That dichotomy was in part promoted by the ideological discourse of the English party in its abolitionist propaganda efforts, but it obscures the fact that several "Portuguese" slave traders invested also in palm oil plantations where they put their captives to work.[45] At the same

[41] For the political influence of the de Souza family in Agoué in 1843, see: Strickrodt, *Afro-European Trade*, 180. For the commercial rivalry between Joaquim d'Almeida and the de Souza family, see: Law, *Ouidah*, 216, 220. For Francisco Felix de Souza, see: Robin Law, "Francisco Felix de Souza in West Africa, 1800–1849," in: José C. Curto and Paul E. Lovejoy (eds.), *Enslaving Connections: Western Africa and Brazil during the Era of Slavery* (Amherst NY: Humanity Books, 2004), 187–211; Alberto da Costa e Silva, *Francisco Félix de Souza, mercador de escravos* (Rio de Janeiro: Nova Fronteira, 2004).

[42] Strickrodt, "Afro-Brazilians," 226 (citing: Imbert O. Akibode, "Contribution à l'étude de l'histoire de l'ancien royaume Agoué (1821–1885)," mémoire de maîtrise, Université Nationale du Bénin (Cotonou, 1988–1989), 27; Pierucci, "Agoué," 11–12; Bouche, *Sept ans*, 302).

[43] Bouche, *Sept ans*, 305.

[44] By 1863, Borghero estimated at Agoué "some hundred Christians, all returned from Brazil after their liberation" and most of them Nago: Borghero, *Journal*, 123.

[45] A similar division seems to have occurred in Aneho: Forbes, *Dahomey*, volume 1, 98; Adam Jones, "Little Popo and Agoué at the End of the Slave Trade: Glimpses from the Lawson Correspondence and Other Sources," in: Robin Law and Silke Strickrodt (eds.), *Ports of the Slave Trade (Bights of Benin and Biafra)* (Stirling: University of Stirling, 1999), 122–134, 125–126. Pierucci mentions the slave traders exchanging their products with the palm oil producers (*palmistes*): Pierucci, "Agoué," 11. In the 1840s Badagry was also controlled by various chiefs associated with the different European nations, the Portuguese and English chiefs (Okhan

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time British and other "legitimate" European traders continued to be indirectly involved in the conduct of the illegal slave trade through commercial exchange, credit networks, and even sales of ships.[46] Equally, many immigrants from Sierra Leone might have not only owned but also bought and sold slaves locally. Therefore, the two types of commerce were thoroughly and inseparably intertwined.[47] And yet, as I shall argue here, nowhere outside the Portuguese town were the interests of the slave trade party so cleverly articulated by recourse to Catholic ceremonial.

In 1846, coinciding with the first collective Catholic baptism in the town, Hanto-Tona – probably another name for Ata Catraia, the *cabboccer* of the Portuguese town – was enthroned as Agoué's new chief.[48] It seems reasonable to wonder if the two events were connected. Similarly the building of a Catholic chapel in Agoué a few years before must be understood against the town's diverse political, cultural, and religious background. Perhaps it was a statement, intended to affirm the prerogatives of the Afro-Brazilian returnees in the face of the increasing influence in the region of Methodist and Anglican missionaries.

When the Catholic missionary Father Bouche was in Agoué in 1874, he was told of the existence of a first chapel erected in around 1835 by a Christian woman who had come back from Brazil. This chapel was allegedly destroyed by fire and the land it had stood on was used as a Christian cemetery, until it was eventually abandoned. Bouche says that Joaquim d'Almeida brought the necessary devotional objects to celebrate Mass in 1842 or 1843.[49] While there is no record of a trip from Brazil in either of

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and Wawu respectively) being the most prominent ones. The town's political polarization between a Portuguese slave trade party and an English lawful trade party was in this case certainly promoted by the Protestant missionaries. See, for instance: Cadbury Research Library, Birmingham, CA2 085, Journal of H. Towsend, September 1845, 10–11; Cadbury Research Library, Birmingham, CA2 031, Journal of Samuel Crowther, February 1845, 42–43. See also: Caroline Sorensen-Gilmour, "Badagry 1784–1863. The Political and Commercial History of a Pre-Colonial Lagoonside Community in South West Nigeria," PhD dissertation, University of Stirling (Stirling, 1995), 208–209. For the palm oil farms of the "Portuguese" at Agoué: Strickrodt, "Afro-Brazilians," 227.

[46] For this involvement in the first decades of the nineteenth century: David Eltis, *Economic Growth and the Ending of the Transatlantic Slave Trade* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1987), 57–60, 83–84.

[47] I thank both Robin Law and Kristin Mann for alerting me on this point.

[48] According to Agoué's oral tradition, after the death of Toyi in 1843, Kodjo-Dahoménou was enthroned, but apparently only ruled until 1846. He was then succeeded by Hanto-Tona who ruled until 1858: Bouche, *Sept ans*, 302; Strickrodt, *Afro-European Trade*, 178, 181. For an analysis of the name Ata Catraia, see: Byll-Cataria, *Histoire*, 6, editor's note 12; Pierucci, "Agoué," 10–11; Strickrodt, *Afro-European Trade*, 181.

[49] Bouche, *Sept ans*, 266.

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those years it is possible that Joaquim began building the chapel when he was in the region between 1839 and 1842. He might then have finished it after his last trip in 1844, when it is likely that he brought a copy of the Jesus image of the Redemption brotherhood, bells, chandeliers, and other liturgical objects. If that is correct, it would account for the reference to a "Portuguese chapel" at Agoué in 1843,[50] and perhaps too for the existence of a first baptism record (as yet to be confirmed) dated 17 April 1844.[51]

Twentieth century authors elaborate on Bouche's information. Isidore Pélofy, a priest of the *Societé des Missions Africanes*, says that the female returnee erected the first chapel in the Fon quarter (Fonkome) and that Joaquim built the second one in 1845, while according to Father Pierucci the first chapel was built in Hausakome.[52] Based on the assumption that Joaquin opened his chapel to worshippers only in 1845, Strickrodt says that the "Portuguese chapel" mentioned in 1843 "presumably" was the earlier one of 1835.[53]

It should be noted that in 1844 the authorities of São Tomé decided to reoccupy the fort of São João Baptista de Ajuda in Ouidah, sending along an army officer and a priest. Forgotten by the Portuguese crown since 1808, this military enclave had been used occasionally by Francisco Felix de Souza, known as "Chacha," for his commercial activities. When the first priest of São Tomé, Julião Pires dos Santos, arrived in February 1844 the fort had been abandoned for some eight years, but all the same Chacha helped him rebuild the chapel, which was finished by September 1845.[54] So it might

[50] Strickrodt, "Afro-Brazilians," 228 (citing: The National Archives, Kew, CO96/2, incl. in W.B. Hutton & Sons, [London] 20 December 1843; J.H. Akhurst, Ahguay, 3 October 1843).

[51] Pazzi, *Introduction*, 90. The first priest sent from São Tomé arrived in Ouidah in February 1844.

[52] Byll-Cataria, *Histoire*, 7; Pierucci, "Agoué," 9, 11. Pélofy dates the fire to 1855 [sic], and locates the cemetery in the Fonkome ruins. Pazzi, *Introduction*, 90, reiterates the date of 1845 for the construction of the second chapel. Both Anne Marie Clémentine Sanvi, followed by Byll-Cataria, identify the founder of the first chapel as Venusa de Jesus, a Brazilian-born woman who arrived in Agoué with her mother Prudencia and her grandmother Feliciana Thereza de Jesus: Anne Marie Clémentine Sanvi, "Les métis et les Brésiliens dans la colonie du Dahomey 1880–1920," mémoire de maîtrise, Université Nationale du Bénin (Cotonou, 1977), 132; Byll-Cataria, *Histoire*, 7, editor's note 15. The same idea is repeated by Milton Guran, *Agudás: os "brasileiros" do Benim* (Rio de Janeiro: Nova Fronteira, 1999), 93. Though the three women were indeed some of the earlier Brazilian settlers of Agoué there is no proof that they were involved in the chapel's foundation.

[53] Strickrodt, "Afro-Brazilians," 228.

[54] Arquivo Histórico Ultramarino, Lisbon, São Tomé, box 487, documents 125, 145, letters by Julião Pires from 12 March 1844 and 7 September 1845. Francisco Felix de Souza would be granted by the Portuguese the title of Cavaleiro da Ordem de Cristo for the reconstruction of the chapel: Arquivo Histórico Ultramarino, Livro 465, f. 141v.

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easily be that the Ouidah and Agoué Catholic chapels were reactivated at roughly the same time.

What seems clear is that by early 1846 the Agoué Afro-Brazilian community had put in place all the necessary elements to celebrate complex collective baptisms. Between that year and the arrival of the first white missionary in February 1863, 493 individuals were baptized, 343 of them, or 70% of the total, during three major collective ceremonies. In the first one, held on 25 and 26 January 1846, Julião Pires dos Santos baptized thirty-nine individuals. The second and most important one took place nearly a decade later, between the 21 and 25 April 1855. That ceremony involved 229 baptisms and was conducted by Faustino Dias d'Andrade. During the third one held between 1 and 4 March 1857, Francisco Fernandez da Silva baptized seventy-five individuals. That event took place just two months before Joaquim d'Almeida's death.[55]

These were major liturgical events, conducted by black or mixed-race priests, "indigenous" clergymen from the islands of São Tomé and Principe, and yet the three mentioned above were ordained in Brazil in 1842 in Bahia, Pernambuco, and Maranhão respectively.[56] The Portuguese fort in Ouidah was an unattractive destination, and only the youngest and most inexperienced clergymen – or those who had disgraced themselves in the eyes of the ecclesiastical powers in São Tomé – were sent or "deported" there.[57] In these circumstances the moral authority these priests had over the Agoué and Ouidah Catholic communities was very little, and, since they depended on the local population for their subsistence, they were subject to the whims and designs of their leaders.[58]

Julião Pires who was in Ouidah for nearly five years from 1844 to 1848 appeared only once in Agoué, signing himself as "in-house vicar" (*vigário interno*) of the Portuguese fort chapel. For nearly ten years, from 1846 to 1855, despite the successive arrivals in Ouidah of four more priests from São Tomé, there is no record of any further baptisms in Agoué, suggesting that the 1846 ceremony might well have been an isolated event. In fact it is not clear whether these early baptisms occurred in Joaquim d'Almeida's chapel in Zokikome, since neither he nor any of his family figure among the record of participants, although certain of his friends were there. On the other hand, in 1855 when Joaquim was certainly present, Father Faustino Dias d'Andrade signed as both priest of Ouidah and "appointed priest"

[55] Agoué Parish Archives, Baptism Book 1, 1846–1874.

[56] Pierucci, "Agoué," 12, claims they were from Angola, but other sources show that Julião Pires and Faustino Andrade were from São Tomé: Arquivo Histórico Ultramarino, Lisbon, São Tomé, box 492. Jean Bonfils, *La mission catholique en République du Bénin* (Paris: Karthala, 1999), 36–37.

[57] Arquivo Histórico Ultramarino, Lisbon, São Tomé, box 494, October 1859.

[58] For the degree of control of the Afro-Brazilian community over the Catholic priests see: Turner, "Les Brésiliens," 156; Cunha, *Negros estrangeiros*, 230.

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(*cura encomendado*) to the chapel of "the Lord and Good Jesus of the Redemption, erected in this port of Agoué."[59] The new title indicates a more consolidated status for the Almeida chapel, and indeed between 1855 and 1860 (but excepting 1856) priests from Ouidah appeared regularly at least once a year, suggesting some sort of agreement with the Brazilian community in Agoué.

Despite Joaquim's apparent absence, the 1846 event was well planned, involving key figures of the Portuguese town. Among the baptized, most of them children, fifteen were free, six freed, and eighteen enslaved.[60] Reproducing categories used in Brazil, three captives were identified as belonging to the Angola nation and one as "Gije" (Jeje). A gender imbalance is noticeable, with ten males and twenty-nine females, a similar predominance of females being seen again in 1855, on which I shall comment later.

The baptismal sacrament creates a bond of spiritual kinship between baptized individual and godparent, but most importantly it establishes a ritual liaison between godparent and parents which in Portuguese is called *compadrio* (co-fathering). Correspondingly, in the case of a baptized slave one may think of *co-senhorio* (co-ownership, perhaps) as describing the relationship between godparent and slave-master. Hence, the rite of baptism articulates social alliances and obligations, often in the form of patron-client relationships, between parents, godparents, and masters. By tracing these nexuses in the baptism records one can map and unveil Agoué's social fabric. Indeed the thirty-nine baptisms in 1846 involved only twenty-four men, meaning that some of them performed repeatedly as godfathers to children and/or slaves of friends who reciprocally acted as godfathers to their own children and/or slaves. This mutual entanglement or "baptismal endogamy" is one of the most well-known characteristics of the Aguda community.

For instance, one of the most prominent figures in 1846 was Benedito Martins da Costa who acted as a godfather on five occasions. Benedito or Bento was a Jeje and at one time lived in the Pilar and Paço parishes in Bahia. He was married to Maria Teixeira and worked as a cook in slave ships, suggesting he may have been involved in the trade, albeit in a small scale. He was also a friend of Joaquim d'Almeida with whom he participated in a baptism ceremony in Bahia in 1832.[61]

[59] Agoué Parish Archives, Baptism Book 1, 1846–1874, f. 20.

[60] Except for one case, all the free and freed baptized individuals had a named father or mother while among the enslaved, only the mothers of three were named.

[61] Arquivo Público do Estado da Bahia, Polícia, maço 5883, "Registro de Passaportes 1834–1837," f. 118v (31 October 1835), f. 123v (20 November 1835), f. 136v (13 January 1836); https://familysearch.org/: Brazil, Bahia, Catholic Church Records, 1598–2007, Santana, "Baptisms 1832–1848," ff. 63, 63v; Verger, *Fluxo*, 441. Note that Benedito had at least two distinct homonyms. I thank Lisa Earl Castillo for most of the Bahian information on Benedito.

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Another outstanding character in the Agoué Aguda community was Eleutério da Silva Vasconcelos who appears in the record four times as a godfather, once as father of a daughter, and once as the master of a slave. The godfather of the slave was José Felix de Souza (son of Chacha), suggesting a client-patron relationship between Vasconcelos and the powerful de Souza family in Ouidah.[62] Eleutério, whose ethnicity was Fon, appears in Bahia in 1836, applying for a passport to Africa.[63] However, a book of the Mission's school at Agoué states that he arrived in 1845 together with "Micer Gonçalos" whom he hosted at his home. The latter was a Brazilian Creole who taught Portuguese and "elements of the Christian doctrine" and conducted religious services at the Zokikome chapel. Thus, together with the São Tomé priests, some of the Brazilian returnees contributed to the Catholic regional catechism.[64]

Another who acted as a godfather was the Mahi barber José Pereira da Paixão, a neighbor and good friend of Joaquim d'Almeida in Bahia, for whom he stood as a witness in a legal case over the disputed ownership of a runaway slave and with whom he applied for passports to Africa in 1835. Paixão continued to live in Zokikome as a neighbor of Joaquim, suggesting a deep-rooted friendship and probably a commercial partnership.[65]

Among prominent female figures were two relatively wealthy slave holders who were returnees from Bahia, both of them Jeje: Theresa Caetana de Jesus, who baptized five slaves, and Fausta Ana da Silva,

[62] Agoué Parish Archives, Baptism Book 1, 1846–1874.

[63] Arquivo Público do Estado da Bahia, Polícia, maço 5883, "Registro de Passaportes 1834–1837," f. 136v (12 January 1836). Benedito Martins da Costa asked a passport next day.

[64] Agoué Parish Archives, École de la Mission Catholique d'Agoué, 1874–1914, f. 4. As the dates of the title suggest, this book was probably a transcription made after 1914 of earlier students' records. The calligraphy is similar to that of Father Isidore Pélofy who might have written the introduction. See also: Bouche, *Sept ans*, 267. One wonders if Micer Gonçalos was the same Gonçalo José Gomes who appears four times as godfather in the 1846 baptisms. In 1860 Gonçalo José Gomes and Eleutério were among the Agoué merchants who signed a letter to the British Consul at Lagos. See: The National Archives, Kew, FO84/1115, incl. in Slave Trade number 30, Letter from the inhabitants and merchants of Agoué, Agoué, 5 March 1860. I thank Kristin Mann and Lisa Earl Castillo for providing a copy of this document. Father Pélofy (in: Byll-Cataria, *Histoire*, 19) lists a Gonçalos, Nago living in Hausakome, "possibly Muslim," and Strickrodt ("Afro-Brazilian," 243 note 130) asks whether he can be identified with "Gonçallo José Gomes Laranjeira." For a discussion on the "indigenation" of missionaries: Cunha, *Negros estrangeiros*, 197–201, 218–220.

[65] Arquivo Público do Estado da Bahia, Judiciário, Processo Crime, Salvador 4/128/3 (1834) "Joaquim d'Almeida e escravo Cipriano," f. 9v; Arquivo Público do Estado da Bahia, Polícia, maço 5883, "Registro de Passaportes 1834–1837," f. 115v; Agoué Parish Archives, École de la Mission Catholique d'Agoué, 1874–1914, f. 2.

who baptized four.[66] They both acted as godmothers for other children which, since godmothering was quite rare, signaled their social prestige and power. Theresa Caetana de Jesus is not to be confused with Feliciana Theresa de Jesus, who, according to the above-mentioned school book, arrived in Agoué in 1835 (or later) with her daughter Prudentia Theresa de Jesus and her grand-daughter Venussa Theresa de Jesus, all residents in Fonkome.[67] Feliciana, Prudentia, and Venussa all acted as godmothers, Feliciana to the daughter of Eleutério da Silva Vasconcelos.

What emerges from this overview is a well-knit social fabric of Brazilian returnees centering on the Fonkome quarter with a predominance of the Jeje, Mahi, and Fon ethnicities. The centrality of Gbe-speaking people in Agoué's Catholic circles, many of them slave-owners, is significant if we take into account that a majority of Aguda returnees were Nago or Yoruba-speaking people.

The Social Entanglements of the 1855 Baptism Ceremony

As already mentioned, the exact whereabouts of Joaquim d'Almeida after his arrival in West Africa in 1845 are unclear. The preserved correspondence of the slave trader and Almeida's business partner José Francisco dos Santos (alias Alfaiate) suggests Joaquim was active in Ouidah between 1845 and 1847.[68] The Lawson family correspondence indicates that he was certainly there between 1848 and 1849, though it is possible he had a base at Agoué too. In December 1848 Joaquim had lost "another" of his ships to the British.[69] That did not prevent his being described nearly a year later, in November 1849, as "a slave-merchant on an extensive scale" and as "the richest resident in Ouidah."[70] Five months later, in April 1850, however,

[66] They appear in Bahian records requesting passports to West Africa in 1836 and 1835: Arquivo Público do Estado da Bahia, Polícia, maço 5883, "Registro de Passaportes 1834–1837," f. 126 (10 December 1835); f. 168v (20 September 1836); Agoué Parish Archives, Baptism Book 1, 1846–1864.

[67] Agoué Parish Archives, École de la Mission Catholique d'Agoué, 1874–1914, f. 2.

[68] The letters mentioning Joaquim were written from Ouidah in 25 May 1845, 31 May 1846, 22 November 1846, 28 December 1846, and 20 January 1847: Pierre Verger, "Influence du Brésil au Golfe Du Bénin," in: *Les afro-américains* (Dakar: IFAN, 1952), 63, 69, 72, 74.

[69] Adam Jones and Peter Sebald (eds.), *An African Family Archive. The Lawsons of Little Popo/Aneho (Togo) 1841–1938* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005), 94, 111; cf. number 1.163: George Latty Lawson, New London, Popo, 14 August 1848; number 1.204: Andreas Malm to Senhor J.G. Baeta, Popo, 3 January 18[49]; number 1.216: George Latty Lawson to Mr Joaquin Almada [sic], New London, Popo, 21 March 1849.

[70] House of Commons Parliamentary Papers, Slave Trade Papers, 1849–1850, Class B, incl. 10 in number 9, "F.E. Forbes to Commodore Fanshawe, 5 November 1849," 22.

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F. E. Forbes reports that Joaquim was resident in Agoué, "filled with slaves."[71] In his journal Forbes also referred to Agoué as a "slave-port, almost a monopoly of José [sic] Almeida."[72]

Robin Law suggests that d'Almeida's move to Agoué may have been caused by his business rivalry with Isidoro de Souza, the new Chacha and boss of the slave trade in Ouidah, who, after the death of his father Francisco Felix de Souza in 1849, had returned from Little Popo. Commercial rivalry between the late Chacha and Joaquim had indeed been growing since Joaquim had begun to operate as a business partner of Azanmado Quenum, a local slave supplier and then a competitor to the de Souzas.[73]

Whatever the reason for the move, Almeida was doomed to misfortune in Agoué. As he vividly expressed it in a letter to one of his creditors, the Portuguese Miguel da Silva Pereira, "on 26 January 1852, I lost everything I had earned by my tears and sweat of my brow, I lost here in Agoué, with the fire, nearly 70 *contos de reis*, even my personal belongings, and I was left with just the shirt I was wearing."[74] The fire, known as Marcelina, was devastating and one wonders if it affected the Zokikome chapel.[75]

In February 1853 Almeida was struggling to recover from the setback by doing business with his partner in Bahia Pedro Pinto da Silveira who had sent him thirty tobacco rolls.[76] Yet, in the same letter, written in December 1853, he declared that he was still unable to repay to Silva Pereira his debt of three *contos*. Joaquim also appears well informed about the latest events in Lagos where the British had deposed Kosoko and re-established king Akitoyé, while trying to expel the Brazilian slavers.[77] Among them was

[71] House of Commons Parliamentary Papers, Slave Trade Papers, 1850–1851, Class A, incl. 3 in number 198, "Forbes, 6 April 1850," 285. Also quoted by Law, *Ouidah*, 216.

[72] Forbes, *Dahomey*, volume 1, 102.

[73] Law, *Ouidah*, 216, 220; Strickrodt, "Afro-Brazilians," 221. For another interpretation, see: Verger, *Os libertos*, 46.

[74] Arquivo Público do Estado da Bahia, Judiciário, 04/1445/1914/05, "Inventário de Joaquim d'Almeida," 1857–1865, ff. 35–36.

[75] Bouche, *Sept ans*, 302–303. Almeida's letter erroneously dates the fire to 1851. For more on the fire see also: Strickrodt, *Afro-European Trade*, 181 (citing: The National Archives, Kew, FO84/893, incl. in Hamilton, [London], 10 April 1852: Lieutenant T.G. Forbes, HMS "Philomel" Whydah, 5 February 1852 [27 January 1852]); Souza, *La Famillle*, 38. One wonders if the fire was named after Marcelina da Glória, who lived in Agoué.

[76] Arquivo Público do Estado da Bahia, Miscellaneous "Receipt from the captain of the *Águia*, Bahia, 15 February 1853." Document found by Lisa Earl Castillo. The parallel stories and relationship between Joaquim d'Almeida and Pedro Pinto da Silveira, also known as Pedro Codjo, deserves a paper on its own and is work in progress.

[77] For these events, see: Verger *Fluxo*, 575 (citing: The National Archives, Kew, FO84/920).

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Joaquim José de Couto, also an arms supplier to Kosoko, who is referred to as "our friend," and the Portuguese Joaquim Pereira Machado who in 1857 became godfather to two of Joaquim's children.[78] Despite the setbacks in his life Joaquim appeared resigned to fatality, invoking "luck" and fortune (rather than God) to recover from bankruptcy.[79] But then he did have powerful business friends who could come to his rescue.

It is against this background of personal economic recovery that we should frame the collective baptism held two years later. The magnitude of the event shows that Joaquim had done rather well, or alternatively that he was using it as an investment to recoup his loses and regain his social prestige. On Saturday 21 April 1855, Father Faustino Dias d'Andrade baptized twenty-three of Joaquim's children and seventy-two of his female slaves, and some of Joaquim's close friends baptized their children and slaves to make a total of 148 baptisms. On the following Sunday sixty-nine more baptisms were conducted. Adding parents, godfathers, godmothers, and guests, the crowd must have amounted to several hundred people, mobilizing practically the whole "Portuguese town" and shaking up Agoué's leisurely daily life!

The festivities certainly resonated in the English town, where Wesleyan influence was growing. Some of the Saro may have seen the events as a challenging demonstration of Brazilian-Portuguese social power. I would even venture to say that the event could have been conceived by Joaquim and his allies as an exhibition of the influence of slave traders at a time when the business was definitively in decline. Underlying the dynamics of prestige and ostentation of the merchant community, one may imagine concomitant economic interests and commercial expectations.

Of course, accompanying the external display, there was an inner dynamic in which Joaquim d'Almeida wished to affirm his leadership in the molds of both Luso-Brazilian patriarchy and the African extended family chieftaincy.[80] The order in which the baptisms took place is significant and expresses hierarchy. The first to be baptized were his own children, followed by those of some of his closest friends, then his slaves followed by the children and slaves of other Fon, Mahi, and Creole returnees. Last of all came the children of a few Nago Muslim families, perhaps signifying relatively greater social distance.

All Joaquim's children had their birth dates registered, information missing in the rest of the baptismal records. The eldest child, Felisberto, was born in August 1841 or 1842 (the writing is not clear in the document) and must have been thirteen years old at the time. If he was born in 1841, he was older than Suterio, who was the only one of Joaquim's sons known

[78] For Couto as an arm supplier to Kosoko: House of Commons Parliamentary Papers, Slave Trade Papers, 1851–1852, Class A, number 203, letter 7, "Senhor de Couto to king Kosoco, 10 July 1849," 331. See also: Verger, *Fluxo*, 457.

[79] Arquivo Público do Estado da Bahia, Judiciário, 04/1445/1914/05, "Inventário de Joaquim d'Almeida," 1857–1865, ff. 35–36.

[80] Yai, "The Identity," 75.

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to have been born in Brazil, and who was his heir in the 1844 will. Suterio had been born in April 1842.[81] The remaining twenty-two children were born between 1845 and 1855, after Joaquim finally settled in Africa. Obviously, they were born to a number of different women.

Unfortunately none of the mothers' names is mentioned, suggesting that Joaquim did not recognize them as legitimate wives and that some of them may have been his slaves. If we cannot properly talk of a polygamous marriage, he nonetheless engaged in multiple sexual relationships, behavior which from a Christian perspective was seriously deviant. However, it prevented neither his own sanctioning of his offspring according to Catholic sacrament nor the São Tomé priest's acceptance of it. Of the twenty-three children only six were girls, a gender imbalance indicative of a male bias in recognizing legitimate descendants, but suggesting also that he may have had some other daughters baptized as slaves.

Following a common Bahian baptism practice, the place of the godmother was always occupied by Our Lady. Also noticeable is the hierarchy among the godfathers. The most prominent was Guilherme Martins do Nascimento who baptized the eight oldest children of Joaquim. Guilherme was a Creole carpenter born in Bahia who, as we saw, had written Joaquim's will and travelled with him in 1844.[82] Joaquim was probably literate himself, but Guilherme's ability to write could well have proved to be of great assistance to Joaquim's trading affairs, and he passed the skill on to his son Ezekiel who was to become a teacher of Portuguese in the Mission school.[83]

Also occupying a distinguished position as godfathers were four children of Francisco Felix de Souza, the Chacha of Ouidah (in brackets the number of times they acted as godfathers): Ignacio Felix de Souza (three), Francisco Felix de Souza Jr. (two), known as Chico to distinguish him from his father, José Felix de Souza (two), and Pedro Felix de Souza (one).[84]

[81] Suterio, son of the Mina Felismina, an ex-slave of Joaquim, was baptized on 12 May 1842, being a month old. The slaver Querino Antônio was his godfather: https://familysearch.org/: Brazil, Bahia, Catholic Church Records, 1598–2007, Sé, "Baptisms 1840–1853," f. 247v. This birth date poses a problem since if correct it implies that Suterio was conceived in July 1841, when Joaquim was in Ouidah.

[82] He also applied for a passport to Africa on 21 April 1842: Arquivo Público do Estado da Bahia, Polícia, maço 5884, "Registro de Passaportes, 1842–1843," f. 53.

[83] Byll-Cataria, *Histoire*, 22.

[84] There were two or three Ignacios. We find an Ignacio Felix de Souza acting as godfather in a baptism in the Santana parish in Bahia in 1821. He may have been a brother of Francisco Felix: Luis Nicolau Parés, "Cartas do Daome," *Afro-Ásia* 40 (2013), 394–395. There was an Ignacio II (born in 1812), a prominent trader with his brother Antônio, who was appointed Chacha III but, accused of revealing the departure of a slave ship to the English, he disappeared around 1860. Ignacio III was born ca. 1835 and would have been twenty years old in 1855: Souza, *La famille*, 150–151, 203, 221.

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The strong presence of the de Souza indicates that the baptismal occasion was used by Joaquim to sign a reconciliation with that powerful family. We have already seen that Joaquim's rivalry might have persisted into the early 1850s with Isidore, the Chacha II, but the 1855 baptism clearly indicates an approximation and some sort of political alliance between the two clans.[85]

Other eminent godfathers were: the business partner and slave trader Pedro Pinto da Silveira already referred to (also known as Pedro Codjo), a North-American slaver operating in Badagry and Porto Novo named Faustino Herpin Branco, the Fon Francisco da Silva Pereira (a former slave of Miguel da Silva Pereira who had been Joaquim's Portuguese creditor in the early 1850s), and, last but not least, José Francisco dos Santos, the Alfaiate, another famous Brazilian slave trader.[86] It becomes clear then that together with the de Souzas, Joaquim was surrounded by some of the richest and most influential slave traders in the region. To attach his progeny to such local notables, I believe, defines the spirit of the event.

After baptizing his own children Joaquim acted as godfather (a role he seldom assumed) to a son of another well-known slaver named João Gonçalves Baêta, and to two children of the late José Pereira da Paixão, his old friend from Bahia. Rather than a purely business alliance, the latter case expresses a bond stemming from friendship and loyalty.[87] The next outstanding baptism – at which Guilherme Martins do Nascimento once more acted as godfather – was that of Matheus, son of Thomazia de Souza Paraíso.

Thomazia was an important figure in Joaquim's life to the point that she is buried alongside him in the Agoué compound. The family memory remembers her as a light-skinned woman who became Joaquim's *amásia* (mistress) in Brazil.[88] Yet Matheus's father is not named and she and

[85] Oral tradition in Little Popo also maintains that Joaquim was good friends with Chico, who succeeded his brother Isidore as Chacha in 1858: Fio Agbanon II, *Histoire de Petit Popo et du Royaume Guin (1934)* (Lomé/Paris: Éditions Haho/Karthala, 1991), 81.

[86] Agoué Parish Archives, Baptism Book 1, 1846–1874. For Faustino Herpin, see also: House of Commons Parliamentary Papers, 1861, Correspondence relating to the attack on Porto Novo, by Her Majesty's Naval Forces on the West Coast of Africa, "Consul Foote to Lord J. Russell, Lagos, 8 March 1861," 1–2.

[87] Strickrodt, though, uses this case as an example of a patron-client relationship: Strickrodt, "Afro-Brazilians," 227. Baêta was a Bahian trader who in the 1840s operated at Atoko in the Volta region, moving further east to Elmima Chica in the 1850s, reaching Agoué in 1856: Strickrodt, "Afro-Brazilians," 221–222 (citing: House of Commons Parliamentary Papers, 1850, Papers respecting the Danish Possessions on the Coast of Africa, "Journal of Governor Winniett, 10 March 1850," 5).

[88] In 1973, Verger (*Os libertos*, 48) was told by a grand-grand-child of Joaquim that the woman buried with him was her *amásia* in Brazil. Marina d'Almeida confirmed that the woman's name was Thomasia (personal communication, 16 April 2013).

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Joaquim do not seem to have had children together. In Bahia Thomazia was a captive of Francisco de Souza Paraíso, a slave trader operating at least since 1812.[89] In 1825, however, Thomazia appears as a single woman, by now freed and a slave owner herself. In August 1836 she sold her house in the parish of Paço, and in September applied for a passport to return to Africa in the company of José Pereira da Paixão, Joaquim's friend.[90] In 1844, when Almeida's will was written, Thomazia was declared as "resident in the Coast of Africa." She had lent Joaquim the significant sum of four *contos de reis*, "without demanding any receipt." Trust of that sort is indicative of their close relationship and indeed Joaquim named Thomazia his second heir, after his son Suterio. Although oral memory describes her as a mixed-race Brazilian, Joaquim's will states that she was an African Jeje.[91] Once in Agoué, Joaquim and Thomazia acted together as godparents to two freed women and a man in 1855 and to two children of the slavers Faustino Herpin and Luiz Alves Ribeiro in 1857. Thomazia outlived Joaquim and she appears in the baptism records up to 1860.[92]

After the "legitimate children" it was the turn of the slaves. Joaquim baptized seventy-three female captives one after the other while Agostinho de Freitas, his Mahi friend who was another prominent local merchant, baptized twenty-two captive women.[93] Though only one de Souza acted as

[89] Verger, *Fluxo*, 457, 476 notes 1 and 3, 641, 644.

[90] https://familysearch.org/: Brazil, Bahia, Catholic Church Records, 1598–2007, Paço, "Baptisms 1817–1859," f. 58, 83v. Arquivo Público do Estado da Bahia, Livro de Notas 255, f. 8–9. I thank Lisa Earl Castillo for providing this data. Arquivo Público do Estado da Bahia, Polícia, maço 5883 "Registro de Passaportes 1834–1837," f. 169v (26 September 1836).

[91] Arquivo Público do Estado da Bahia, Judiciário, 04/1445/1914/05, "Inventário de Joaquim d'Almeida," 1857–1865, ff. 5, 6v. Oral tradition says that Joaquim was advised to flee from Ouidah, because he was *amasiado* with a woman descended from deposed King Adandozan, who was enslaved and sent to Brazil by King Guezo in revenge for Adandozan's having sent Guezo's mother, Na Agotime, to Brazil: Verger, *Os libertos*, 46. Another version says that Mino, Joaquim's wife, was an ex-wife of Adandozan: Abanon, *Histoire*, 84. Could that descendant or ex-wife of Adandozan and *amásia* of Joaquim be the same Thomazia?

[92] Agoué Parish Archives, Baptism Book 1, 1846–1874. Father Pélofy (in: Byll-Cataria, *Histoire*, 26) identifies Alvez Ribeiro as a Mahi Brazilian living in Fonkome.

[93] Agostinho de Freitas applied for passports to Africa on 23 November 1835 and 15 March 1843: Arquivo Público do Estado da Bahia, Polícia, maço 5883, "Registro de Passaportes 1834–1837," f. 124; maço 5884, "Registro de Passaportes 1842–1843," f. 395. He may have brought his son Ildefonso with him from Brazil: Agoué Parish Archives, École de la Mission Catholique d'Agoué, 1874–1914, f. 1; Byll-Cataria, *Histoire*, 16, 18. He was one of the merchants who signed the letter against Pedro Pinto da Silveira in 1860: The National Archives, Kew, FO84/1115, incl. in Slave Trade number 30: "Letter from the inhabitants and merchants of Agoué" (Agoué, 5 March 1860).

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godfather to one of de Freitas's slaves, both Joaquim and Agostinho shared some of their common friends to perform the role: the Creole Guilherme Martins do Nascimento, the Mahi Venacio do Amaral, the Fon Francisco da Silva Pereira, and the North American Faustino Herpin. Among the godfathers of Joaquim's slaves figured the Mahi Luiz Alves Ribeiro, the same Agostinho de Freitas, the Jeje Antônio Caetano Coelho, the Mina Pedro Pinto da Silveira, the Nago Antônio Pereira dos Santos, and Bento Geraldo, to name just a few of them. Even that brief list reinforces the abovementioned idea of "baptismal endogamy" among the merchant returnee community.

It would be both tedious and exhausting to list the remaining baptisms of 1855 and 1857 which ultimately serve to confirm the existence of a very close social network.[94] However, one aspect deserving particular attention is that in both those years, even if in a somehow secondary position, there appeared at the baptisms several members of families known for their affiliation to Islam. On 21 April 1855, for instance, at the end of a very long day, the Nago and Muslim Antônio Pereira dos Santos baptized his two daughters, Constança (Talabi) and Romana. Constança's mother was Francisca Mondukpê who would become a powerful local slave trader. Next day, various members of the da Glória family, former slaves of the Nago Maria da Glória São José in Bahia, appear, either baptizing their own children or as godparents. Among them was a Nago named Daniel da Glória, who later became Imam of the Diata mosque, and his Creole son Adriano who succeeded him.[95]

[94] For instance, in 1857 Joaquim d'Almeida baptized five more children, as did some of his trader colleagues: Faustino Herpin (three), Francisco da Silva Pereira (two), Luiz Alves Ribeiro (two), and Eleutério da Silva Vasconcellos (one). All of them acted as godfathers, as did the São Tomé priests Julião Pires dos Santos and Francisco Fernandez da Silva, together with Agostinho de Freitas, Venancio do Amaral, and Thomazia de Souza Paraíso. Slaves of Agostinho de Freitas (fifteen), Joaquim d'Almeida (eight), and Eleutério da Silva Vasconcelos (one), were also baptized.

[95] Daniel da Glória was Imam from 1837 to 1843: Byll-Cataria, *Histoire*, 19, 23; Paul Marty, *Études sur l'Islam au Dahomey: Le Bas Dahomey – Le Haut Dahomey* (Paris: Éditions Ernest Leroux, 1926), 119. For an account of Maria da Glória São José and her former slaves see: Lisa Earl Castillo, "The Exodus of 1835: Àguda Life Stories and Social Networks," in: Tunde Babawale, Akin Alao and Tony Onwumah (eds.), *Pan-Africanism and the Integration of Continental Africa and Diaspora Africa*, volume 2 (Lagos: Centre for Black and African Arts and Civilization, 2011), 27–51. The names appearing in the Catholic records are: Daniel da Glória (1855), Adriano da Glória (1855, 1857), the Nago Francisco da Glória (1855, 1857, 1858), the Nago Jorge da Glória (1855, 1858), Magdalena da Glória (1855, 1857), Marcelina da Glória (1855), Maria da Glória (1855), Luiza da Glória (1855), and Alexandrina da Glória (1857, 1858), among others.

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As noted by Olabiyi Yai, Aguda Islam was secular, pragmatic, and non-*jihadist*, and could coexist peacefully with Catholicism.[96] It was common for Muslims with Bahian experience to send their children to the Catholic Mission school, or to give them one Koranic and one Biblical name. In later Catholic records there appear a number of Aguda described as "Muslim Christians."[97] The participation in more than one religion or the superposition of faiths was one of the local habits most deprecated by European missionaries.[98] However, for those returning from Brazil this ecumenical tolerance was part and parcel of what Yai has called the "Aguda lusotropie."[99] As Borghero says "the idea that there is a false religion and a true one is not conceivable to the black. For him *religion is but a local use*. One has a religion like one has its customs and practices."[100]

This very pragmatic and practice-oriented approach to religion, almost a "religion without a faith," is what makes the use of the term "affiliation" more appropriate than "conversion." Aside from doctrinal ignorance and pagan customs like polygamy, the missionaries complained also that most of the returnees' Catholic activities, like going to mass, baptizing their children, learning prayers or fasting on specific days were no more than "external practices," or public gestures lacking sincere belief or devotion.[101] Indeed the concept of a "secular religion" primarily based on ritual participation and oriented towards the solving of worldly problems must have been a general trend.

It is not my intention here to enter the debate on syncretism and the depth of cultural change Catholicism imposed on African and Afro-American societies.[102] Suffice to say that a few years after the baptism ceremonies described above, in March 1859, some of the participants must have joined the Portuguese town party in supporting their candidate to be Agoué's head chief. They "assembled on the beach fully armed, and dressed

[96] Yai, "The Identity."

[97] This was the case, for instance, of Apollinario do Rego, who appears identified as such in 1877: Agoué Parish Archives, École de la Mission Catholique d'Agoué, 1874–1914, ff. 20, 25. See also: Borghero, *Journal*, 285–286.

[98] Cunha, *Negros estrangeiros*, 193, 227.

[99] Yai, "The Identity," 74.

[100] Borghero, *Journal*, cited in: Cunha, *Negros estrangeiros*, 195.

[101] Bouche, *Sept ans*, 264. The Aguda Catholic practices, at least in Lagos, also involved prayers (*novenas*) during the festivities of Our Lady of the Conception, Christmas, and the Epiphany, when a donkey and a mule were paraded through the streets, which has been read as an allusion to the *burrinha*: Verger, *Os libertos*, 45–46.

[102] See, for instance: James Sweet, *Recreating Africa: Culture, Kinship, and Religion in the African-Portuguese World, 1441–1770* (Chapell Hill NC: The University of North Carolina Press, 2003); John K. Thornton, *África e africanos na formação do mundo atlântico 1400–1800* (Rio de Janeiro: Elsevier, 2004); Lucilene Reginaldo, *Os rosários dos angolas: irmandades de africanos e crioulos na Bahia setecentista* (São Paulo: Alameda, 2011).

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in a variety of fantastic ways," and "marched, or rather danced through the town" with their cutlasses and muskets, and while they "beat their drums, and rattled a number of calabashes having cowries attached to them, they uttered a sort of chant, which I supposed was a declaration of their readiness to fight for the man of their choice."[103]

Such partisan mobilization against the English town candidate is significant in itself, but the use of dance, drums and rattles also indicates a complex set of cultural practices in sharp contrast to the conventional image of a Christian community, wearing European clothes to gather in orderly fashion at a Catholic church.

This political manifestation, together with the ubiquitousness of Vodun worship, gives a glimpse of the kind of hybrid and plural religiosity at work in the "Portuguese town," one that could be described, using Otávio Velho's expression, as "paganized Christianity."[104] Therefore, the returnees' Afro-Catholicism was far from being a merely external imitation of the Christian liturgy; rather it was a selective appropriation of particular social practices that were in accordance with the Africans' worldview and practical needs. Not only that, but the Catholic habits and institutions imported from Brazil were further transformed and adapted on the African Coast.

Bahian Antecedents: Collective Baptisms and the Brotherhood

Collective baptisms were no novelty in the Catholic Atlantic world. We know of the mass baptism of enslaved people in Angola or Cape Verde before they were shipped for the Americas.[105] In Brazil, slave owners were obliged to instruct their captives in the Christian faith, teach them how to pray, and baptize them within a year of their arrival.[106] In Bahia collective

[103] Wesleyan Methodist Missionary Society Archive, London, West Africa Correspondence, Box 263: William West, Cape Coast, 6 June 1859. I thank Silke Strickrodt for providing a copy of her PhD dissertation where this document is cited: Silke Strickrodt, "Afro-European Trade Relations on the Western Slave Coast, 16th to 19th Centuries," PhD dissertation, University of Stirling (Stirling, 2002), 215–216.

[104] Otávio Velho, "Missionization in the Postcolonial World: A View from Brazil and Elsewhere," in: Thomas Csordas (ed.), *Transnational Transcendence: Essays on Religion and Globalization* (Berkeley/Los Angeles: University of California Press, 2009), 31–54, 44.

[105] See, for instance: Alonso de Sandoval, *De instauranda Aethiopum salute: el mundo de la esclavitud negra en America* (Bogota: Biblioteca de la presidencia de Colombia, 1956), 348–349.

[106] Henry Koster, *Travels in Brazil 1809–1815* (London: Longman, Hurst, Rees, Ormes and Brown, 1817), 238–239. See also: Mieko Nishida, *Slavery and Identity: Ethnicity, Gender, and Race in Salvador, Brazil, 1808–1888* (Bloomington/Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 2003), 30.

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baptisms of enslaved Africans and Creole children were conducted in most parishes, often on days coinciding with Catholic feasts like Epiphany (6 January), Saint John (24 June), or on New Year's Day, but they never reached such high numbers as those of the 1850s Agoué baptisms.

In the early decades of the nineteenth century in Bahia, baptism emerged as being particularly well suited to articulating social alliances, namely through the institution of godfathering. As a juridical shadow or extension of parenthood, godfathering became an important means by which prosperous freed Africans could achieve social visibility and establish networks of patron-client relationships with godchildren, their parents and slave owners. While in Agoué parents and masters seemed to gain status by baptizing their children and their slaves, in Bahia the ones who accumulated prestige were the godparents.

For example, between 1824 and 1833, José Pedro Autran, a Nago freedman married to an important Candomblé priestess, was godfather to at least fifty-five individuals, fifty of them slaves of whom the great majority belonged to different masters.[107] Similarly, between 1809 and 1834 the Nago couple Francisco Moreira and Rita de Campos baptized at least sixty-eight individuals, sixty-two of them slaves. However, in that case the slaves belonged to rather fewer owners, among whom was the above mentioned Maria da Glória São José, suggesting a more dense and intertwined social fabric.[108] In Bahia, the influential presence of such powerful Africans as godparents seems to have declined after the 1830s, so that when Joaquim d'Almeida resorted to collective baptism in the 1850s to build up his clientelist network, the practice had already gone into relative decline.

In the 1830s and 1840s Joaquim d'Almeida acted as godfather to various godchildren but never in the sort of numbers just cited. Nevertheless, his Bahian experience taught him the value of baptism ceremonies for upward social mobility, and it certainly shaped his Agoué baptism project in 1855. I shall now briefly present two such Bahian collective baptisms which although quite different in their social configuration illustrate the possibilities Joaquim perhaps saw in them for articulating alliances.

On 7 October 1832 Joaquim came together with some of his African peers, most of them Jeje, at the Santana church in one of Salvador's more densely African neighborhoods. He and Benedito Fernandes Galiza acted as godfathers to two slaves of Antônio de Araújo Santana. Subsequently Inocêncio de Araújo Santana acted as godfather to a slave of Joaquim. Present also at the ceremony baptizing their slaves or acting as godfathers were Antônio Caetano Coelho and Bento Martins da Costa whom we met

[107] Luis Nicolau Parés and Lisa Earl Castillo, "José Pedro Autran e o retorno de Xangô," *Religião e Sociedade* (forthcoming, 2016).

[108] The list of godchildren of Moreira and Campos was produced by Lisa Earl Castillo using multiple sources including notary books and baptism records. See: Castillo, "The Exodus."

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earlier in Agoué.[109] What is important to take into account is that all these Africans were involved in the illegal Atlantic slave trade. So Antônio, Inocêncio, Joaquim, Benedito, Antônio Caetano, and Bento, were in effect using a ritual bond to reinforce their friendship and, probably, their ethnic Jeje solidarity at the same time as their commercial interests. The entanglement of trade, slave ownership and Catholic baptism is central to understanding the sociability of affluent freed Africans in Bahia in the early nineteenth century, and it was precisely that very same formula that Joaquim d'Almeida would seek to reproduce at the other side of the Atlantic.

Nearly two years later, on 2 July 1834, the day celebrating in Bahia the anniversary of Brazilian Independence, Joaquim appears in another baptism ceremony, but this time in a quite different context. Now, instead of his African partners he was with his former master, the mixed-race Manoel Joaquim d'Almeida, in the residence of a respected white man, one Joaquim Coimbra de Andrade who was the local Judge Scrivener in the Paço parish.[110] After baptizing certain of his host's all-white children and those of one of his friends, Joaquim was granted the "privilege" of being godfather to some of their African slaves.[111] Joaquim's acceptance within his former master's social circle was complementary to the alliances established with his Jeje fellow countrymen. In fact his ability to articulate these simultaneous vertical and horizontal class relationships stands as a key factor in understanding Joaquim's social and economic success. As we have seen, his social talent was what enabled him to establish commercial partnerships with very influential Bahian and Portuguese businessmen.

Another important antecedent that shaped Joaquim's understanding and appropriation of Catholicism was his participation in lay brotherhoods. We know that he was a member of the popular brotherhood of Our Lady of the Rosary of the Baixa dos Sapateiros.[112] However, the fact that he named the chapel in Agoué after the Redemption brotherhood indicates the importance he ascribed to it. Manuela Carneiro de Cunha is surely right to underscore that the tradition of brotherhoods, as associations of lay people with substantive control over religious activities and as self-managed organizations, were instrumental in the reproduction of Catholicism among returnees to Africa.[113]

[109] https://familysearch.org/: Brazil, Bahia, Catholic Church Records, 1598–2007, Santana, "Baptisms 1832–1848," ff. 63, 63v. I thank Lisa Earl Castillo for sharing this reference with me.

[110] For the post of Scrivener in the Paço parish in 1836: Neusa Rodrigues Esteves (coord.), "Devassa do Levante de Escravos ocorrido em Salvador em 1835," *Anais do Arquivo Público da Bahia* 54 (1996), 9–321, 134.

[111] https://familysearch.org/: Brazil, Bahia, Catholic Church Records, 1598–2007, Santo Antônio, "Baptisms 1828–1840," f. 196v.

[112] Arquivo da Irmandade de Nossa Senhora do Rosário da Baixa de Sapateiros, Salvador, "Livro de irmãos," n.d., f. 50.

[113] Cunha, *Negros estrangeiros*, 199.

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There is no evidence of the existence of a brotherhood in Agoué, but the experience of administrative autonomy Joaquim had acquired in the Bahian confraternities was certainly influential in his missionization project. It is also important and revealing to understand the details of the Redemption brotherhood in the Corpo Santo church, as compared with other similar associations. Founded in 1774, the Redemption confraternity fulfilled the usual functions of taking care of its member's funerals and celebrating the yearly feast of Jesus of the Redemption on 3 May. Its members were of different African ethnicities, but its board of directors was monopolized by Jeje Africans at least until the 1830s. There were barbers, musicians, army officers, *capitães do mato*, sailors etc., but there were also an unusual number of prosperous slave owners and slave traders. In fact the higher ranks of the brotherhood were filled by what appears to have been a Jeje lobby with commercial and financial interests in the slave trade.[114]

It is not unthinkable that, when Joaquim d'Almeida built his chapel in Agoué under the auspices of this fraternity, he was envisaging not only spiritual benefits, but also the reproduction of a similar mutual-aid association. It should be noted that contrary to most black brotherhoods oriented toward aiding the neediest in society, the Redemption seems to have functioned to favor its most privileged members, in some cases acting as a capitalist commercial society with investments in the slave trade and real estate.[115] The social network that emerged from the Agoué baptisms examined above can easily be identified as just another economic elite. In both cases we have an African merchant community in a Diaspora context being articulated by means of Catholic institutions, and although the brotherhood and the baptism ritual are obviously different things there seems to be an Atlantic continuity in the spirit of the thing.

Beyond Identity: The Articulation of a Merchant Community

So what can we conclude from all this? The first observation is that, as explained by Cunha, Catholicism was co-extensive with a particular social group, namely the Aguda community. Only Portuguese, Brazilians, and Afro-Brazilian returnees and their descendants and dependants were allowed to practice Catholicism. In Ouidah, the Dahomean king prohibited the conversion of natives, though the rule was relatively easy to subvert by recourse to various subterfuges.[116] In such cases "the indigenous person

[114] For a detailed analysis of the Redemption brotherhood: Parés, "Militiamen." *Capitães do mato* were militiamen usually employed in capturing fugitive slaves.

[115] Parés, "Militiamen."

[116] Borghero, *Journal*, 93, 251; Cunha, *Negros estrangeiros*, 213, 221. This seems to have changed in the 1870s when in Ouidah many children from "pagan" parents were baptized: Ouidah Parish Archives, Baptism Book 1, 1866–1884.

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who converts to Christianity is conceived as having renounced to his/her country, and like Christians they are considered foreigners."[117] Hence baptism transformed people ipso facto into "Brazilians" and "foreigners."[118]

Affiliation to a Western religion was perceived as a sign of prestige and distinction and many pagans were attracted to it too.[119] However, Afro-Brazilian returnees were reluctant to baptize indiscriminately and restricted the privilege to their own children and slaves. Later, European missionaries would follow the same policy, although for different reasons, restricting the sacrament to those who had received at least some theological instruction. Hence Catholicism was not inspired by proselytism nor any universalist spirit, but rather had an insular and exclusivist character, functioning as a critical mark to include or exclude somebody from a social group.[120]

The effectively non-native condition conferred by Christianity was also racially codified. Baptism transformed people into "whites," that is "blacks who are called white because they live with the manners of whites."[121] That seems to correlate with but is also a shift from the scenario seen in Sierra Leone. In the United States, the American-born and future migrants assumed their blackness as a critical mark of their African identity, but once in Sierra Leone race ceased to be an operative diacritic, so they resorted to Christianity and civilized manners to define their Africanness.[122] In the Aguda case, African-born returnees became "whites" by means of their Catholic affiliation, hence "race" became a by-product of their religiosity. To this day Aguda have a racialized perception of their identity and most of them appeal to ideas of racial mixture and miscegenation. As noted by Yai, however, there is an internal "who's who" system that distinguishes between "red" Aguda (descendants of Portuguese or mixed-race) and "black" Aguda (descendants of former slave returnees).[123]

Baptism seems also to have conveyed a distinctive legal status approaching slaves to freedom. In Father Borghero's words, "in the country's language (…) the names *white* and *Christian* are synonyms of *master* and *free*," and "baptism is a kind of emancipation which makes the child of a slave able to be considered the child of the master."[124] Indeed, the mother of a slave might or might not have been present at her child's baptism, but the owner was always there, as if representing the slave's father. That was why an owner

[117] Borghero, *Journal*, 150.

[118] Cunha, *Negros estrangeiros*, 189, 224–225.

[119] Borghero, *Journal*, 150; Cunha, *Negros estrangeiros*, 189, 220.

[120] Cunha, *Negros estrangeiros*, 226.

[121] Borghero, *Journal*, 150; also cited in: Cunha, *Negros estrangeiros*, 225. See also: Borghero, *Journal*, 251; Bouche, *Sept ans*, 267.

[122] James Sidbury, *Becoming African in America. Race and Nation in the Early Black Atlantic* (Oxford/New York: Oxford University Press, 2007), 6–9.

[123] Yai, "The Identity," 75.

[124] Borghero, *Journal*, 248–49, 251. Also cited by Bouche, *Sept ans*, 267.

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very rarely acted as godfather to his own slaves, because being already conceived as a symbolic father he could not simultaneously occupy the position of surrogate father. In that context then, as the "child" of a free person the captive stood closer to freedom, although that did not prevent baptized slaves from being treated as subaltern aggregates.

One noticeable aspect is that after 1860, coinciding with the arrival of the French Mission, baptisms of enslaved people almost completely stopped, both in Agoué and in Ouidah, signaling a significant difference.[125] From the point of view of the Aguda it was the slaver's privilege to grant his captive the right to be baptized and to do so followed a logic of securing both the owner's existing human property and his rights over any progeny. For the missionaries, on the contrary, baptism should be the expression only of individual choice, thus in principle it was incompatible with slavery.[126] For a missionary, Christianity and slavery were theoretically irreconcilable, while for the Aguda not only was Christianity compatible with slavery, as it was in Bahia, but baptism was indeed a means to reaffirm and perpetuate it.

As evidence of that we see that between 1846 and 1857 more than half the 360 baptisms held at Agoué, 183 to be precise, were of enslaved people. The other noticeable aspect, but which differed from the Bahian precedent, is that of that total only five were male, meaning that the overwhelming majority was female.[127] The rationale of such numerical inequality of gender remains obscure, but one hypothesis is that, in the face of the official prohibition of converting the indigenous population, the baptizing of female slaves granted "Brazilian" status to any offspring the captives might produce, which would then widen the community's demographic base. A perhaps more persuasive hypothesis is that baptizing female slaves was a way to increase the suitable marriage pool for male Aguda, thereby reinforcing the endogamous character of the group. Miguel d'Almeida, for instance, one of Joaquim's sons baptized in 1855, ended up marrying Josepha Titi, one of his father's slaves who had been baptized the

[125] In the Agoué book of the 203 slaves baptized between 1846 and 1874, only three were baptized after 1860, one in 1863 by Borghero, and two in 1869, by Sequer: Agoué Parish Archives, Baptism Book 1, 1846–1874.

[126] See: Borghero, *Journal*, 285. This, of course, should not obscure the fact that baptism was applied en masse to enslaved Africans throughout the slave trade period. Also in the 1860s missionaries did buy slaves when a work-force was needed; they would baptize them and ultimately set them free: Borghero, *Journal*, 111, 113; Turner, "Les Brésiliens," 159–160 (citing: Archives of the Société des Missions Africaines, Rome, 12/802.00, number 17301, "Courdioux Journal," Ouidah, September 1862).

[127] In the Agoué book, of 203 slaves of a total 801 baptisms, only nine were male.

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same day.[128] It is a matter that needs further thought, but what is clear is that baptism was used as an instrument for aggregating women to the group.

Summarizing, we can say that Catholic baptism was perceived as a mark of foreign origin and of use of the Portuguese language, but it also implied a racial identity and to a certain extent connoted the legal status of freedom. However, I am keen to avoid the trap of framing Aguda baptism as no more than a problem of identity. Going beyond the basic idea of Catholic affiliation as being co-extensive with Brazilianness, my argument is that the Agoué collective baptisms – in particular the one occurring in 1855 – may be read as social events whose main implicit purpose was to articulate or perhaps even to activate a merchant community.

I have already pointed out that the ceremonies were not so much about the baptized children as about those responsible for them, that is their parents, their godparents, and their masters. Secondly, religious affiliation was affirmed through ritual participation rather than by profession of belief. Engagement in the liturgy of the baptismal sacrament, reminiscent of so many other local initiation rites, was an effective way of publically expressing belonging and shared values.[129] Ultimately the ceremonial constituted a spectacular event, followed by an abundance of food, music, and dancing, whose main purpose was to express and make public the social bonds between its participants. But it was not only that; the event became itself a space productive of those relationships.

I have repeatedly stated that the 1855 festivities contributed to the *articulation* of a merchant community. The concept of articulation, as conceived by Crapanzano, refers to a process by which experience "is rendered an event, it is cast within the world of meaning and may provide the basis for action."[130] The baptism event translated mundane social relationships into the extraordinary realm of spiritual bonds, such as that of godparenting or *compadrio*. The ritual could frame trade interests also, or personal obligations, within new formal liaisons sanctioning alliances or redressing conflicts, and allowing for new joint ventures. Hence the ceremony, more than an exhibition of an elite's social wealth, was in itself an event constitutive of a network; it somehow transformed community into association. At the very least it created among its members an awareness and memory of their mutual interests.

Of course such a complex event (a total social fact, if you wish) cannot be reduced to flat one-dimensional economic determinism. As I have

[128] Agoué Parish Archives, Baptism Book 1, 1846–1874.

[129] For instance, children may have a customary "baptism" in which the *joto* or ancestral guardian spirit is identified by the old aunts of the collectivity: Souza, *La famille*, 75–76.

[130] Vincent Crapanzano, "Introduction," in: Vincent Crapanzano and Vivian Garrison (eds.), *Case Studies of Spirit Possession* (New York: John Wiley, 1977), 1–40, 10.

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suggested, it intertwined all sorts of bonds: political and commercial alliances, as illustrated by the de Souza family and the many slave traders present; patron-client relationships; and in some instances ethnic solidarity too. Far from absent were personal relationships involving friendship, loyalty and emotional bonds, as exemplified by Joaquim and Thomazia, while other cases encompassed a mixture of all of the above, as in the case of Joaquim's long-standing friends from Bahia, José Pereira da Paixão, Antônio Caetano, and Guilherme Martins.

Yet, despite such a multidimensional spectrum of liaisons, my final reading is that the baptism event's grand design was to create and reinstate commercial partnership. In contemporary idiom one would say it was a successful exercise in public relations at the service of a particular lobby, namely that of "the slave trade party." This instrumental and pragmatic use of a Catholic institution owed a great deal to Almeida's experience both as a member of the Redemption brotherhood – which also functioned as a lobby for African slavers – and to his participation as godfather in several baptisms in Bahia. Joaquim's adapted reproduction of the institution and his use of it to orchestrate his own political goals expresses autonomy, agency, and great social talent. Beyond his potential spiritual engagement with Christian devotion, Joaquim coordinated efforts to stage a social meeting he must have perceived as beneficial to him personally. Just like the Saro or Akou from Sierra Leone, who used Masonic lodges to promote their business and upward social mobility, Brazilians used the spirit of the Catholic lay brotherhood and the church liturgy.[131] Bouche remarked, "the accentuated corporative spirit (*esprit de corps*) often translates into festivities where the religious idea dominates."[132]

Taking into account their migrant status and their control of long distance commerce, especially the illegal slave trade between the decades of 1830 and 1850, the Aguda certainly fit into the category of "trading diaspora."[133] Their affiliation to Catholicism served them to mark their difference from local competitors, and was aimed at economic and political advantage. Their use of a foreign religion allowed them to establish authority and social control by reproducing the old association between faith and power.[134]

[131] Borghero, *Journal*, 290.

[132] Bouche, *Sept ans*, 264; quoted also in: Cunha, *Negros estrangeiros*, 189 (citing: Archives of the Société des Missions Africaines, Rome, 12/802.00, number 21147, "Bouche to Planque," Lagos, August 1863).

[133] This concept was originally proposed by Abner Cohen, "Cultural Strategies in the Organization of Trading Diasporas," in: Claude Meillassoux (ed.), *The Development of Indigenous Trade and Markets in West Africa* (London: Oxford University Press for the International African Institute, 1971), 266–281. The term is also used by Cunha, *Negros estrangeiros*, 22.

[134] See, for instance, the Kongo elite conversion to Catholicism in the fifteenth century.

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Looking back to the other side of the Atlantic, to Bahia, especially as it was in the second half of the nineteenth century, one sees another Afro-Brazilian economic elite in which merchants, often Atlantic ones, played a key role there too.

In that other diaspora, Candomblé or the *orixá* worship rather than Catholicism was instrumental in encouraging communal solidarity and a sense of belonging.[135] By the end of the century some of its most representative temples were promoting an exclusivist discourse of Nago or Yoruba superiority which was intended to establish religious authority and social status. Lorand Matory argues that the success of such an idiom of ethnic and ritual purity resulted from two factors: "the condition of diaspora and the role of merchants interests in making diasporas endure as communities."[136] Interestingly in the Aguda case the same two factors seem never to have produced an ideology of either ethnic or ritual purity. On the contrary, if anything Aguda Catholic practices celebrated hybridity and were systematically criticized and confronted by the discourse of religious purity imposed by European missionaries. Regarding ethnicity, despite its exclusivism Aguda identity encompassed all sorts of ethnic groups and racial tones, although in relation to the Agoué Catholic baptisms, as already suggested, the Gbe-speaking people (Mahi, Fon, Jeje) seem to have outranked other demographically more numerous ethnic groups like the Nago or Haussa.

As I hope to have shown ethnic solidarity was not the most dominant force in the Afro-Catholicism of the Aguda. Their collective baptism rituals seem to have operated rather as social theater where patriarchalism, clientalism, and lobbying were interwoven with the promotion of a merchant elite. Despite its Brazilian antecedents the Catholic institution as reproduced in Agoué underwent significant transformations in its Atlantic transfer. There was an obvious change in scale, the overall magnitude of the event being greatly increased. Also, contrary to the Bahian model, parents and slave-masters like Joaquim d'Almeida or Agostinho de Freitas, in their roles as community patriarchs, seem to have been more important than godparents in the accumulation of social prestige. Then, inasmuch as baptism became an integrative mechanism into an endogamous group there was a gender shift in privileging enslaved women. Finally, I have underscored the

[135] Candomblé is the name given to Afro-Brazilian religion. Its ritual practices involve healing, divination, initiation, possession, sacrificial offerings, and the worship and celebration of African deities known as *orixás*, *voduns*, and *inquises*.

[136] Lorand Matory, *Black Atlantic Religion. Tradition, Trans-Nationalism and Matriarchy in the Brazilian Candomblé* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2005), 116. See also: Luis Nicolau Parés, "The Birth of the Yoruba Hegemony in Post-Abolition Candomblé," *Journal de la Société des Americanistes de Paris* 91–1 (2005), 139–159.

use of the baptism ceremony as a platform for the articulation of plural social relations, with the emphasis on slave trade interests, precisely at a moment when the business of human flesh was being seriously menaced and already in decline.

In relation to the more theoretical questions outlined in the initial section of this paper, the Aguda case in Agoué gives us valuable insights into the general problem of migration and how, in a diaspora context of relative freedom and wealth, migrants managed to achieve strong social organization. Appealing to various cultural referents (kinship, race, ethnicity, language, religion) they activated useful political and economic alliances. As I have tried to highlight, it was through continuous feedback between mercantile activity and cultural collective mobilization that a "community of trust and shared interests" was articulated. Catholic affiliation – rather than faith – was given privilege in the analysis of social organization. Though other studies, like the one of Cunha, have highlighted the Aguda as a trading diaspora and Catholicism as one of their main diacritic signs, this paper has tried to shed light on the interface between them. In focusing on Catholicism, but without excluding either Islam or the local vodun worship, the paper also hints at the complex process of religious interpenetration and change. Without entering the mainstream debate on syncretism, the Aguda case, working by example, reveals the dynamic of strategic aggregation or accumulation that shapes religious affiliation, where juxtaposition and cultural hybridity prevail. I agree with Yai, that the Aguda provide an inspiring experience of ecumenical tolerant religious coexistence.[137]

Finally the paper advances a few ideas about the relationship between Christianity and the slave trade in the period discussed. Slavery was clearly integral to and to a certain extent reinforced by Aguda Catholicism. On the other hand the English-speaking Protestants of Sierra Leone may have professed themselves to be opposed to the foreign slave trade, but they were not necessarily anti-slavery in the broader sense. The association of Christianity with the discourse of civilization and the end of slavery in Africa, although it had its antecedents, gained strength and visibility only after the arrival of the European missionaries of the Société des Missions Africaines. However, for their subsistence they had to resort to the support of the slave traders and even to engage as slave owners. The time frame chosen for this essay, however, stops purposely in 1860, a year before the arrival of the foreign missionaries. Hence, a more detailed analysis of how the missionaries confronted Aguda Catholicism and addressed it, and how the Aguda responded, must be the subject for a follow-up project.

[137] Cunha, *Negros estrangeiros*; Yai, "The Identity."

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