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Brazil in the Map of Africanness: Examining Roots Tourism and International Black Relations[1]

1. African-American Tourism to Brazil: Brief History and Main Aspects

African-American roots tourism can be situated in the long history of the search for Africa by Afro-descendants in the New World which includes such important events as the actual migration of Afro-descendants to the African continent during the foundation of Liberia in 1822, as well as the influential Pan-African congresses which acknowledged the commonality between Africans and the world's dispersed blacks. It was only in the early 1970s, however, that African-American roots tourism to Africa started to operate as such. The 1976 publication of Alex Haley's bestseller *Roots* greatly inspired African-American culture and politics in a period marked by a growing awareness by diasporic blacks of the need to *recover* – or, according to Stuart Hall (1998), *produce* – both their links with Africa and their

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1 This article is part of a wider, ongoing research project which analyzes a very specific kind of tourism carried out by U.S. African-Americans who travel to Brazil, among other destinations within the African diaspora, seeking what they consider to be their African roots. In addition to other reasons, African-American roots tourism is stimulated by the belief that there is a dispersed black sibling-hood – the African diaspora itself – waiting to be reconnected. The novelty brought by this kind of tourism is that it inverts (although not completely) the secondary position occupied by Brazil in a context marked by the hegemony of US-centric conceptions of blackness, thus promoting cultural expressions developed in the southern hemisphere as important references of blackness and Africanness for northern blacks. On the other hand, these tourists travel with the purpose of exchanging their "modernity" for the "traditions" of the local black communities with whom they interact. Therefore, this study takes into account the asymmetry which permeates the relations between blacks located in the North and the South of the American continent, focusing on their cultural and political consonances and dissonances, and their unequal access to global currents of power. The concept of the "map of Africanness" is herein developed to assist in the analysis of the significance of Brazil for African-American tourism as well as in the broader black Atlantic world.

own Africanness. Before that, Richard Wright's influential book *Black Power*, published in 1954, had also contributed to increasing the image of Africa among African-Americans. By the late 1970s African-American roots tourists expanded their routes to include non-African countries. These countries were, nonetheless, inhabited by significant Afro-descendant populations, and known for having a legacy of well preserved African cultures.

The African-American roots tourists focused on here represent a very specific kind of tourist, not just because they are searching for what they believe to be their roots, but most of all because, in contrast to common tourists who are usually interested in finding the exoticism of the "other", African-American roots tourists crisscross the Atlantic hoping to find the "same" represented by their "black brothers and sisters". In this sense, African-American roots tourism represents a way of re-connecting the fragmented transnational African affiliation. Thus, I prefer to call this phenomenon "roots tourism" rather than, for example, "ethnic tourism", even though this term could certainly be employed to describe "roots tourism", as I have done on other occasions (Pinho 2002/2003). Roots tourism is indeed a kind of ethnic tourism because it sets in motion people who are searching for elements that can be used to compose their black ethnic identities. However, there are two reasons why I am opting for the term "roots tourism". First, "ethnic tourism" has been employed by authors such as Dean MacCannel (1992) and Pierre van den Berghe (1994) to describe the process by which people from overdeveloped countries travel to poor areas to cohabit with the "exotic cultures" of the "other", sometimes even aiming to "go native". In roots tourism, the primary goal is to find the "same", even though this "same" is usually not quite as "similar" as most tourists would like it to be. In fact, the frustrations and disenchantments of the roots tourists in Brazil are important outcomes of their visits, even if not as much as their satisfaction with the "Africanness" of the people and the "authenticity" of the culture they encounter in their trips.

The second reason for the use of the term "roots tourism" is the magnitude of *African roots* in African-American popular culture in general, and in African-American tourism specifically. Among the most important motivations for visiting Brazil, African-Americans view the country as a place where they can gain access to their roots.

By *root*s I mean mainly two aspects: first, the *cultural roots*, the abundant "African traditions" that African-Americans believe they have lost but which are considered to have been preserved among Brazilian blacks. The second notion of roots is the idea of *family roots*, of course not in the sense of encountering blood relatives like in Alex Haley's quest for Kunta Kinté; but *family roots* in the sense of the diasporic family that has been dispersed by slavery and colonialism.

Due to their search for *cultural roots* or *preserved African culture*, roots tourists elect the Brazilian state of Bahia, especially its cities of Salvador and Cachoeira, as the main historical place where they believe African traditions have been more carefully maintained. The most important "pilgrimage site" is clearly the town of Cachoeira, where the tourists participate in the annual event held in August by the black Sisterhood of the Good Death (Irmandade da Boa Morte). Founded in 1823, the Sisterhood is composed exclusively of older black women, who are both Catholics and practitioners of *Candomblé*.[2] Like most of the syncretic Afro-Brazilian parties, the Festival of the Good Death begins as a sacred ceremony, with secret rituals held indoors for the sisters only, and ends as a profane one, with a public *samba-de-roda*[3] and a generous Afro-Brazilian feast prepared by the sisters and offered to all visitors.

Besides Cachoeira, the lost and therefore sought out African traditions that are so valued by the roots tourists can be found also in Salvador, in the many places where Afro-Bahian cultural events take place, like the rehearsals of the *blocos afro*[4], in the houses of *Candomblé*, and in the schools of capoeira. Bahian Africanness can be relished even in the trays of the *baianas*, women street vendors who dress in traditional white African clothing and sell African-derived

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2 Candomblé is the most well known Afro-Brazilian religion.
3 Samba de roda is a traditional form of dancing samba in a circle.
4 The *blocos afro* are black cultural organizations that emerged in Bahia the 1970s seeking to overcome racism within the sphere of Carnival. Responding to racial-aesthetic discrimination, which excluded blacks from participating in carnival groups *(blocos)*, a group of black activists founded their own *bloco*, called Ilê Aiyê, one in which only people with very dark skin would be allowed to participate. At present, the *blocos afro* surpass the boundaries of Carnival and entertainment, producing new references of blackness and involving themselves in the dynamics of political culture.

delicacies such as *acarajés* and *abarás*. African-American scholar Rachel J. Christmas describes the "African flavor" that Bahia offers to its African-American visitors:

> We felt the African pulse in the beat of samba, known as *semba* in Angola; swallowed it with the spicy food, made with nuts, coconut milk, ginger and okra also used in African cooking; witnessed it in Candomblé ceremonies, rooted in the religion of the Yorubas of Nigeria; heard it in the musical Yoruban accent of the Portuguese spoken in the state of Bahia. [...] Today Bahians seem far more aware of their origins than African-Americans are (Christmas 1992: 253-254).

Bahia is described in this statement as a complete menu, in which the tourists can delight in the flavors of the various African origins of the traditions found in Brazil. Most of the African-American visitors I interviewed believe that Brazilian blacks enjoy the privilege of having better maintained the African culture of their ancestors. They also believe that as a consequence of their preserved African culture, Brazilian blacks are "more aware" of their African origin than are African-Americans.

The search for African traditions is tied up with the tourists' longing to find "authenticity". The desire to find "original black culture" has led them to deviate from the predominant route followed by international tourists in Brazil, one which usually takes them to the so--called "post-cards of Rio de Janeiro" (the statue of Christ – Corcovado, the sugar loaf hills – Pão de Açúcar, the beach of Copacabana, etc.). Roots tourists prefer Bahia to Rio de Janeiro, because they argue that in Rio "African culture" has been disjointed from its origin, while in Bahia one can still find "more preserved" elements of the original culture brought by the African ancestors. Bahia is considered the producer of black symbols labeled with the stamp of "African authenticity". In Rio de Janeiro, the syncretic presence of Umbanda, together with a carnival that has been transformed into a spectacle, point to a black culture that is believed to have become "too mixed" and "detached from its origins", while in Bahia, elements like Candomblé and samba-de-roda seem to provide proof of the "perpetuation of Africanisms" and therefore of a supposedly authentic (and purer) kind of black culture. The image of Bahia as the "blackest state of Brazil" results partially from scholarly work, such as its high position in Melville Herskovitz's rank of Africanisms (1941), but it also has more

recent sources, among them the State Government's efforts in promoting Bahia as the "land of blackness" (Pinho 2004).

Even within Bahia a specific cultural hierarchy is established, one that places more value on what is considered more "deeply African" among the cultural sets of Bahian "Africanness". Instead of "capoeira regional", which is considered "mixed", the roots tourists prefer "capoeira Angola" seen as "pure". Rather than the younger houses of Candomblé, which are more explicitly influenced by Western Spiritism, they favor the old "traditional" houses. In place of the *bloco afro* Olodum, which appears too modern, greater status is given to Ilê Aiyê because it is seen as more "faithful to its African traditions". The *blocos afro* headquarters, the oldest of which is 30 years old, are gaining a similar reputation of traditionality as the centenarian houses of Candomblé, also becoming "sacred places of pilgrimage" (Turner 1969).[5] I argue that the specific meanings of Brazil as a place to find "preserved African traditions" should be analyzed alongside the meanings attributed to the other countries which compose the "map of Africanness".

2.   The Map of Africanness

I am coining the term "map of Africanness" to refer to the group of countries visited by the African-American tourists. Evidently, I do not mean that African-Americans limit their tourism to these countries only. In fact, several of the tourists I interviewed are members of organizations such as the Travelers Century Club, which give awards to people who have visited 100 countries, 200 countries, and so on. This fact tells a great deal about who these tourists are since it indicates that many of them have a significant amount of disposable income to spend on leisure. Obviously not all African-Americans can afford to travel abroad. If there are so many differences – pertaining to age, religion, geographical origin, etc. – among African-American tourists, even greater discrepancies exist within the African-American population as a whole. Heterogeneities among African-Americans are cer-

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5   It is important to notice that this notion of Bahia as a source of Africanness has also stimulated a yet incipient but growing internal cultural tourism in Brazil, in which black activists from Rio and Sao Paulo travel to Bahia to find the "source of Brazilian black culture".

tainly taken into account in this research project, as well as the different ways in which African-Americans from different social classes envisage Africa.[6]

The "map of Africanness" that I am sketching here contains only those countries which the tourists visit with the explicit purpose of heightening their *sense of black identity*. One could correctly argue that visiting a European country would also be valuable for that effect. However, if I am to examine the tourists' discourse, then the "map of Africanness" includes only those countries located in Africa and in the African diaspora. There is a hierarchy within this imaginary "map of Africanness", in which each place is assigned a different meaning. Egypt is considered the "place of black pride", the great proof of the existence of a magnificent black civilization prior to Rome or Greece, and therefore a reference to counter hegemonic Eurocentrism with an Afrocentrism based on the richness and great discoveries of the Nile. West African countries such as Ghana, Senegal, Nigeria and Benin are understood as the "place of origin", the location from where the ancestors left to face the horrors of the Middle Passage; hence the dungeons and staging areas of the slave trade are the main attractions for the tourists in these countries. Brazil also has a specific meaning inside this map: it has become the "place to find preserved traditions", hopefully the same traditions that are believed to have been lost among blacks in the United States.

Consequently, the visitors *sense the pride* of visiting and connecting with the sophisticated Egyptian and Ethiopian civilizations; they *experience the suffering* undergone by their ancestors when they go to the infamous "Doors of No Return" in West Africa; and they also *feel the joy* of attesting to the reality that descendants of slaves like themselves were able to maintain a rich African culture in the New World. Feelings of pain, joy, anger, and the jubilation of reconnection are inspired in each place visited in the "map of Africanness".

In *Wonders of the African World,* a pedagogical documentary created to explain Africa to African-Americans, U.S. scholar Henry Louis Gates Jr. travels throughout the African continent, stopping at

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6   The film *Little Senegal*, by Jean Bréhat and Rachid Bouchareb, offers a very interesting portrayal of the meanings of Africa and Africans for underprivileged African-Americans.

most of the countries that constitute what I am calling the map of Africanness. One of the reasons that stimulated Gates Jr. to make the documentary was that, in his own words: "like most African-Americans of my generation, I'm obsessed with finding my roots". While visiting Elmina Castle, Ghana, Gates Jr. affirms:

> We feel at home here because we are surrounded by black people. That's why we come. But the memory of slavery and of what our ancestors must have gone through is always lurking. Even a pretty little harbor town like Elmina is dominated by a slave castle. And for us a slave castle is like Auschwitz.

This is a strong statement and is obviously not the first to associate the horrors of African slavery to the terrors of the Jewish Holocaust. Indeed, the comparison between African-American tourism to the slave dungeons in Africa and the so-called "holocaust tourism" carried out by Jews who visit the Nazi concentration camps is a very important - one for both analytical and political reasons, and is examined in my work. However, as we can hear in Gates Jr.'s statement, African-Americans visit Elmina and other slave sites in West Africa, not only to mourn the memory of the ancestors, but also "to be surrounded by black people". Being among a black majority is undoubtedly one of the main reasons that attract African-American tourists to Brazil as well. The difference, nonetheless, is that in their visits to Brazil, the tourists don't have to deal with the suffering attached to the fact that some Africans were themselves active slave owners and slave dealers, since in Brazil the "brothers and sisters" they reconnect with are perceived as "siblings in destiny", a term I am coining to represent the feeling of being among those who are marked by a similar trajectory.[7] Evidently, the idea that Afro-descendants in the diaspora form a special kind of transnational "family" is not a new one. It can be traced back to the rhetoric of Pan-Africanism, and was of crucial importance for Marcus Garvey's movement, and for the discourses of Négritude. African-American tourists in Brazil constantly comment that *they* could have been born there instead of in the United States. The *unpredictability of the destiny* of their ancestors is conceived of together

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7   There certainly were Brazilian Afro-descendants actively involved in the slave trade, however, this is not publicized by the Brazilian tourism industry.

with the *certainty of their own common fate*, marked by slavery, op-
pression, struggle and resistance.[8]

African-American film maker Thomas Allen Harris describes his
search for the African homeland outside of Africa: in Brazil. In his
documentary, which carries the suggestive title *That's my Face* (*É a
Minha Cara*), Harris describes how his personal longings overlap with
a wider African-American quest for a place where it is possible for a
black person to feel comfortable. Revealingly, Harris finds "his face"
in Bahia. "To find what I was looking for I had to go to Brazil", we
hear him declaring as if answering a whispering female voice that
continuously sings in the background: "Go to Brazil: find the Orixás
there…" Walking in the streets of Salvador on an ordinary hot after-
noon, Harris comes across another African-American visitor, who
explains to him the reason for her visit:

> I needed to feel what it feels like to be part of the majority. I needed to be
> in a place where everyone else looked like me. I needed to be in a place
> that felt like home, not because I was born there, but because my spirit
> was at home there.

Why has Brazil become an imagined home for African-Americans?
How do we define "home-places" vis-à-vis "other people's places"?
How are these definitions related to how we conceive of the inhabi-
tants of the places we select, especially when we elect "home-places"
in other countries? And how are these choices connected to our identi-
ties or to what we consider our identities to be? For Gillian Rose
(1995), there are three ways in which emotions about places can be
connected to the notion of identity: identifying with a place; identify-
ing against a place; or not identifying. When we identify with a place
it is because, in some way, we feel that we *belong* to that place. We
identify with places in which we feel comfortable, where we feel *at
home,* because "part of how you define yourself is symbolized by
certain qualities of that place" (Rose 1995: 89). Senses of place can

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8   The statement of Congressman Charles Rangel upon the introduction of the
    House Concurrent Resolution 47 (2004) (that recognizes the connection between
    Afro-descendants in Latin America and the Caribbean and Afro-descendants in
    the US) reveals this feeling of kinship: "These people are our brothers and sisters
    through the slave trade and like us they are suffering from similar problems. The
    ships that brought us to the U.S. could have easily taken us to the Dominican Re-
    public, Colombia or Brazil. I introduced this resolution as a reminder of our
    common history and need to work together to address our common problems."

have different scales: local, regional, and national. What is novel about roots tourism is that it stimulates senses of place on a *transnational* scale, which goes beyond the boundaries of nations, and conceives of dispersed people as part of a same group; in this case, the African diaspora: the black family.

Having or wanting a place where we feel we belong is part of how we understand our own place in the world. The map of Africanness imagined by African-American tourists encompasses a number of different countries with different and specific meanings. Which are the places that African-Americans feel they belong to? Which are the different feelings they have for each of these places? I find the term "map" useful to reflect on these questions. Maps indicate a sense of shared connotations, a collective system of senses in the vein of what Stuart Hall has defined as "maps of meanings": "the systems of shared meanings which people who belong to the same community, group, or nation use to help them interpret and make sense of the world" (Hall 1995: 176). As Hall indicates, having a position within a set of shared meanings gives us a sense of who we are, and where we belong, in other words: a sense of our own identity.

For Dolores Hayden (1995), we should think of places taking into account the many meanings of this word, and analyze them as cultural products. To "know someone's place" implies *spatial* and *political* meanings. This expression has been widely used in Brazil in reference to black people. To say that "black people should know their place" is an obviously racist, but unfortunately still often heard statement, and implies at the same time *physical location* and *social position*. Since I am also interested in the impacts of African-American tourism on local people, it seems relevant to consider that the tourists have access to "places" (in both their spatial and political meanings) that Brazilian blacks many times do not. Expensive restaurants and fancy hotels, inaccessible for many Brazilian blacks, are easily accessed by black American tourists. On the other hand, even though black, they are still foreigners; they are still tourists, and are therefore seen as entitled to visiting expensive places. What does it mean for Brazilian blacks to see African-American visitors overcoming spatial barriers, if it indeed means something? This question is, as of yet, unanswered.

Explaining the connections between power and place, Hayden (1995) asserts that one of the strategies used for disempowering cer-

tain groups has been by limiting their access to space. Women and members of minority groups have been historically subjected to that kind of limitation. Gender and race can be mapped as a struggle over social reproduction, for which the production of place is essential. For Hayden, the expression "knowing one's place" is revealing of the limitations imposed on these excluded groups. Consequently, the effort to regain places, or to establish new places as one's own, is a struggle that occurs in the realm of power.

Following Hayden, I argue that, by imagining their "physical" place as not just one but many places, African-Americans are struggling to expand "their place" in US society, in the sense that they are not accepting the boundaries previously established on their social position. On the other hand, however, when choosing to visit places where they can find "African roots", it seems to me that they are at the same time "knowing their place" since they are limiting the possibilities to those places which are supposedly "African" or where one can find "African traditions". For that reason, I argue that the map of Africanness carries the contradiction of being at the same time *broad* and *limited*. It is *broad* for the reason that it includes a large number of countries and because it dares to envisage affiliations beyond national borders. On the other hand, the map of Africanness is *limited* because it upholds racial boundaries by restricting the imagined affiliation to specific countries and peoples considered to be holders of African roots.

Traveling to places because we believe there are cultural traditions to be found there relates to a common and widely accepted notion that cultures – and, as a consequence, cultural identities – are embedded in places (Massey/Jess 1995). According to Stuart Hall (1995), we have a tendency to *landscape* cultural identities, to give them an imagined place or home. Diasporic affiliations, however, open up the possibility for contesting the way in which *place* has been traditionally connected to *culture* and *identity*.

> From the diaspora perspective, identity has many imagined "homes" (and therefore no one, single, original homeland); it has many different ways of "being at home" – since it conceives of individuals as capable of drawing on different maps of meaning, and of locating themselves in different imaginary geographies at one and the same time – but it is not tied to one particular place (Hall 1995: 207).

It seems to me, nonetheless, that there are interpretations of the diaspora which do not necessarily break with the notion of *tradition* as the element which links us to our origins in culture, place and time. In the case of roots tourism, the notion of diaspora is very much stimulated by a conservative conception of tradition[9] which understands it "as a one-way transmission belt; an umbilical cord, which connects us to our culture of origin" (Hall 1995: 207). The map of Africanness, as imagined by the tourists, tries to fulfil the wish of a shared system of meanings among blacks in the diaspora but the more it is crisscrossed, the more it entails heterogeneity, especially in the ways in which blackness itself has been conceived.

The concept of the map of Africanness is valuable because it indicates that there is a correlation between the many places visited by the African-American tourists. The meanings attributed to one spot in the map are connected to meanings attributed to other places in the very same map. Consequently, it is a map built by complementariness and opposition. The uniqueness of a place in the map of Africanness is established in relation to what supposedly lacks in the other places, but most of all, within what African-American tourists believe lacks within themselves, or in the places where they live. The map of Africanness is thus a diagram which traces the *routes* that are tracked in search of *roots* (Gilroy 1993).

Although the many different places wandered by the tourists should be understood as complementary pieces of the same "map of Africanness", there is, however, a fundamental distinction between the roots tourism developed in the West African countries and the one that is carried out on the "Diasporic side" of the Atlantic, and that distinction is one that involves pain and joy. The experience of visiting the dungeons and the menacing "Doors of No Return" evokes the horrors

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9   David Harvey points to the limits of place-bounded identities: they have to rest at some point on the motivational power of tradition. However, it is difficult to maintain a sense of historical continuity in the face of the space-time compression of globalization. For Harvey, "the irony is that tradition is now often preserved by being commodified and marketed as such. The search for roots ends up at worst being produced and marketed as an image, as a simulacrum or pastiche (imitation communities constructed to evoke images of some folksy past […]. At best, historical tradition is reorganized as a museum culture […] of how things once upon a time were made, sold, consumed, and integrated into a long-lost and often romanticized daily life […]" (Harvey 1989: 304).

suffered by the ancestors, and many tourists are reported to have wept in silence or screamed out loud to express how deeply devastated they felt when visiting these places. Conversely, while visiting Brazil, the roots tourists don't have to deal with the pains associated with the horrors of slavery. Instead, being in Brazil instils in them the joy of connecting with "a culture that was able to survive", and with a people that managed to preserve the cultural connections with Africa.

3. The Place of Brazil in the Map of Africanness

The feeling of joy felt by the tourists in Brazil is mainly promoted by the tourist agencies that have little interest in publicizing the country's enormous racial and social inequalities and the still very present legacy of slavery. Although there are agencies in Brazil that specialize in exploring poverty and which carry out "favela-tours", Bahia is still mostly rhymed with "alegria",[10] an image in which black culture plays the central role. A symptomatic example of this is the way in which Pelourinho is represented. The word *pelourinho* was used in the slavery period to describe the public places where slaves were whipped (sometimes to death). Today, the term Pelourinho names the neighborhood located in the most touristy area of Salvador. There is no monument there symbolizing the pain inflicted on the slaves. Instead, Pelourinho is associated with pleasure. Its colorful streets are filled with souvenir stores and it is the place where the *bloco afro* Olodum holds its concerts for natives and tourists. Pelourinho is a must-visit place for anyone that comes to Bahia, and those who visit it ironically dance, drink and enjoy themselves while treading on the same cobblestoned streets in which African slaves were beaten and punished not much more than a hundred years ago.

However, in spite of all the joy and excitement experienced during their visits to Brazil, African-American visitors also have to deal with their own frustrations, especially when they realize that Brazilian blacks have other ways of understanding blackness and Africanness. One of the most striking disappointments among the tourists revolves

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10 The word "alegria" means joy, happiness, pleasure, bliss. Besides the constant rhyming of Bahia with "alegria" in songs and poems, the official slogan of the State Government tourism agency (Bahiatursa) is "Bahia: terra da felicidade" ("Bahia: land of happiness").

around the fact that the black Sisterhood of the Good Death worships a white saint. The affiliation of the sisters to both Candomblé and Catholicism, already confusing and disappointing enough for the tourists, is usually understood as a lack of "purity" and "authenticity". For the Sisterhood, however, the cult of Our Lady of Glory is located within a context of religious syncretism that, in itself, represents a strategy of struggle and survival of African beliefs. Therefore, it is important to analyse the different ways in which black communities conceive of blackness and Africanness, recognizing that ready-made constituencies are many times frustrated and go un-corresponded.

Roots tourism in Bahia can be analysed as part of the wider process of international exchange of black symbols and objects throughout the diaspora, or what Paul Gilroy defined as the black Atlantic, where elements of black politics and aesthetics constantly travel among black communities, detaching from their local origins and becoming re-elaborated in new contexts. The novelty brought by black roots tourism is that it destabilizes the hegemony of US-centric conceptions of blackness by promoting locations previously seen as peripheral in the African diaspora.

Nevertheless, roots tourism does not completely invert the hierarchy within the black Atlantic. First, there is an intrinsic inequality in tourism between those who have access to travel and those who do not (MacCannell 1992). And in the case of African-American roots tourism, a second kind of inequality is propagated through the visitors' belief that they will exchange their *modernity* – represented especially by the history of Black Power and the Civil Rights movement – for the *traditions* that Brazilian blacks are supposedly privileged to be able to maintain. This obviously unequal and hierarchical exchange between African-Americans and the local black communities they visit takes place not only in Brazil, but also on the African continent, as demonstrated by Paulla Ebron in *Performing Africa*:

> Indeed, the travelers expressed their worry that Africa unfortunately lagged behind in material ways. Luckily, they had a solution to the continent's "problems". As businessmen, with a consciousness of course, they would *develop* Africa (Ebron 2002: ix).

Thus, at the same time that the process of roots tourism offers the possibility of challenging traditional North-South flows of cultural exchange, it also confirms the existing hierarchy within the black At-

lantic. The most important poles remain firmly situated in the Anglophone North, a fact which reflects the weak positions of African and Latin American countries in the context of the global configuration of power. The unequal distribution of power has terrible consequences not only for those located in the southern hemisphere but also affects those who inhabit the economic and political centers, especially by increasing their already sizeable unawareness toward the "rest of the world".

African-American tourists, earnestly interested in building transnational connections and, of course, favored by material resources, manage to transcend this generalized ignorance. Therefore an examination of roots tourism promises to reveal the ways in which Southern communities are creating new definitions of blackness and exporting their own symbols, objects, concepts, and ideas – all of which demonstrate that new paths are being opened up and that international channels of communication and circulation can follow other directions.

There certainly are alternative ways of understanding the African diaspora and the webs that connect and multiply dynamic, interchangeable and hybrid black cultures. More than mere repeaters of traditions, black cultures can be understood as cultures that are created through dynamic global fluxes of communications and exchanges, and that does not mean we must refute their African inheritance or their black particularity. My intention with this analysis is neither to evaluate the purity of cultural claims, nor to measure their level of truth or falsity. Valuing imagination and invention, the notion of the map of Africanness assesses tourism as a space for the creation and struggle over discourses of identities, memories of Africanness and representations of blackness. As an open-ended search, roots tourism carries within it an immeasurable treasure: the possibility of overcoming the very geography of power which thus far has permeated the map of Africanness.

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